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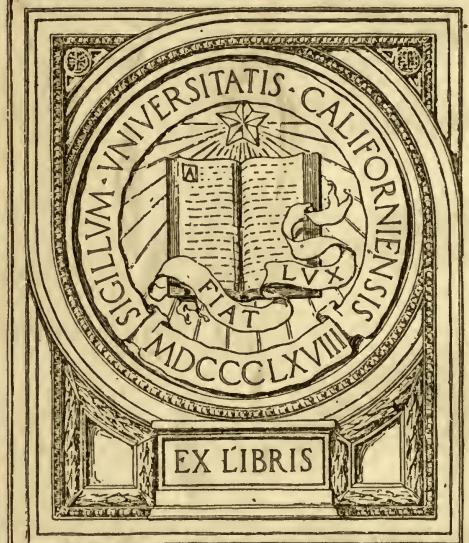
Class of 1907



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Throughout the forenoon Webster and Dolores, from the deck of the steamer, watched the city

WEBSTER —MAN'S MAN

BY

PETER B. KYNE

Author of
"Cappy Ricks," "The Three Godfathers," Etc.

ILLUSTRATED BY
DEAN CORNWELL

GARDEN CITY NEW YORK
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LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

Throughout the forenoon Webster and Dolores, from the deck of the steamer, watched the city . . . . . *Frontispiece*

FACING PAGE

As she passed, John Stuart Webster looked fairly into her face, started as if bee-stung, and hastily lifted his hat 64

"Mr. William H. Geary," the girl remarked that night, "I know now why your friend Mr. Webster sent that cablegram. I think you're a scout, too" 112

Webster planted a bullet in Benavides's abdomen with his first shot, and blew out the duelist's brains with his second 336

370021

WEBSTER—MAN'S MAN

Webster—Man's Man

CHAPTER ONE

WHEN John Stuart Webster, mining engineer and kicker-up-of-dust on distant trails, flagged the S. P., L. A. & S. L. Limited at a blistered board station in Death Valley, California, he had definitely resolved to do certain things. To begin, he would invade the dining car at the first call to dinner and order approximately twenty dollars' worth of ham and eggs, which provender is, as all who know will certify, the pinnacle of epicurean delight to an old sour-dough coming out of the wilderness with a healthy bankroll and a healthier appetite; for even as the hydrophobic dog avoids water, so does the adventurer of the Webster type avoid the weird concoctions of high-priced French chefs until he has first satisfied that void which yawns to receive ham and eggs.

Following the ham and eggs, Mr. Webster planned to saturate himself from soul to vermiform appendix with nicotine, which he purposed obtaining from tobacco with nicotine in it. It was a week since he had smoked anything, and months since he had tasted anything with an odour even remotely like tobacco,

for the August temperature in Death Valley is no respecter of moisture in any man or his tobacco. By reason of the fact that he had not always dwelt in Death Valley, however, John Stuart Webster knew the dining-car steward would have in the ice chest some wonderful cigars, wonderfully preserved.

Webster realized that, having sampled civilization thus far, his debauch would be at an end until he reached Salt Lake City—unless, indeed, he should find aboard the train something fit to read or somebody worth talking to. Upon arrival in Salt Lake City, however, his spree would really begin. Immediately upon leaving the train he would proceed to a clothing shop and purchase a twenty-five-dollar ready-to-wear suit, together with the appurtenances thereunto pertaining or in any wise belonging. These habiliments he would wear just long enough to shop in respectably and without attracting the attention of the passing throng; and when later his "tailor-mades" and sundry other finery should be delivered, he would send the store clothes to one Ubehebe Henry, a prospector down in the Mojave country, who would appreciate them and wear them when he came to town in the fall to get drunk.

Having arranged for the delivery of his temporary attire at the best hotel in town, Webster designed chartering a taxicab and proceeding forthwith to that hotel, where he would engage a sunny room with a bath, fill the bathtub, climb blithely in and soak for two hours at least, for it was nearly eight months since he had had a regular bath and he purposed

making the most of his opportunity. His long-drawn ablutions at length over, he would don a silken dressing gown and slippers, order up a barber, and proceed to part with enough hair and whiskers to upholster an automobile; and upon the completion of his tonsorial adventures he would encase his person in a suit of mauve-coloured silk pajamas, climb into bed and stay there for forty-eight hours, merely waking long enough to take another bath, order up periodical consignments of ham and eggs and, incidentally, make certain that a friendly side-winder or chuck-walla hadn't crawled under the blankets with him.

So much for John Stuart Webster's plans. Now for the gentleman himself. No one—not even the Pullman porter, shrewd judge of mankind that he was—could have discerned in the chrysalis that flagged the Limited the butterfly of fashion that was to be. As the ebony George raised the vestibule platform, opened the car door and looked out, he had no confidence in the lean, sun-baked big man standing by the train. Plainly the fellow was not a first-class passenger but a wandering prospector, for he was dog-dirty, a ruin of rags and hairy as a tarantula. The only clean thing about him was a heavy-calibred automatic pistol of the army type, swinging at his hip.

"Day coach an' tourist up in front," the knight of the whiskbroom announced in disapproving tones and started to close down the platform.

"So I perceived," John Stuart Webster replied blandly. "I also observed that you failed to employ

the title *sir* when addressing a white man. Put that platform back and hop out here with your little stool, you saddle-coloured son of Senegambia, or I'll make you a hard porter to catch."

"Yassah, yassah!" the porter sputtered, and obeyed instantly. Mr. Webster handed him a disreputable-looking suitcase and stepped aboard in state, only to be informed by the sleeping-car conductor that there wasn't a vacant first-class berth on the train.

"Yes, I know I'm dirty," the late arrival announced cheerfully, "but still, as Bobby Burns once remarked, 'a man's a man for a' that'—and I'm *not* unsanitary. I sloshed around some in Furnace Creek the night before last, and while of course I got the top layer off, still, a fellow can't accomplish a great deal without hot water, soap, a good scrubbing-brush and a can of lye."

"I'm very sorry," the conductor replied perfunctorily and endeavoured to pass on, but Webster secured a firm grip on his lapel and frustrated the escape.

"You're not sorry," the ragged wanderer declared, "not one little bit. You're only apprehensive. However, you needn't be. There is no wild life on me, brother, I assure you. If you can prove it, I'll give you a thousand-dollar bill for each and every bit of testimony you can adduce."

"But I tell you, the train is full up. You'll have to roost in the daycoach or the tourist. I'm very sorry——"

"So am I, for I know what daycoaches and tourist-cars smell like in the middle of August, because, as the poet says, 'I've been there many a time and oft.' Nevertheless, despite your deep grief, something tells me you're spoofing, so while I must, of necessity, accept your suggestion, said acceptance will be but temporary. In about two hours, young fellow, you're going to make the alarming discovery that you have bats in your belfry." And with a whiskery grin which, under the circumstances, was charming in its absolute freedom from malice, Mr. Webster departed for the daycoach.

Two hours later the conductor found him in the aforementioned daycoach, engaged in a mild game of poker with a mule-skinner, a Chinaman, an aged prospector, and a half-breed Indian, and waited until Mr. Webster, on a bob-tailed club flush, bluffed the Chinaman out of a dollar-and-a-half pot.

"Maud, Lily, and Kate!" Webster murmured, as the Celestial laid down three queens and watched his ragged opponent rake in the pot. "Had I held those three queens and had you made a two-card draw as I did, only death could have stopped me from seeing what you held! Hello! Here's Little Boy Blue again. All right, son. Blow your horn."

"Are you Mr. John S. Webster?"

"Your assumption that I am that person is so eminently correct that it would be a waste of time for me to dispute it," Webster replied quizzically. "However, just to prove that you're not the only clairvoyant on this train, I'm going to tell *you* some-

thing about *yourself*. In your pocket you have a telegram; it is from Chicago, where your pay-check originates; it is a short, sweet, and comprehensive, containing an order which you are going to obey. It reads somewhat as follows:

"'My friend, John S. Webster, wires me from Blank that he boarded train at Blank and was refused first-class accommodation because he looked like a hobo. Give him the best you have in stock, if you have to throw somebody off the train to accommodate him. Unless you see your way clear to heed this suggestion your resignation is not only in order but has already been accepted.' Signed, 'Sweeney.'

"Do I hit the target?"

The conductor nodded. "You win, Mr. Webster," he admitted.

"Occasionally I lose, old-timer. Well?"

"Who the devil is Sweeney?"

John Stuart Webster turned to his cosmopolitan comrades of the national game. "Listen to him," he entreated them. "He has worked for the company, lo, these many years, and he doesn't know who Sweeney is?" He eyed the conductor severely. "Sweeney," he declared, "is the man who is responsible for the whichness of the why-for. Ignorance of the man higher up excuses no sleeping-car conductor, and if your job is gone when you reach Salt Lake, old-timer, don't blame it on me, but rather on your distressing propensity to ask foolish questions. *Vamos, amigo,* and leave me to my despair. Can't you see I'm happy here?"

"No offense, Mr. Webster, no offense. I can let you have a stateroom——"

"That's trading talk. I'll take it."

The conductor gave him his receipt and led him back to the stateroom in the observation-car. At the door Webster handed him a five-dollar bill. "For you, son," he said gently, "just to take the sting out of what I'm about to tell you. Now that I possess your receipt and know that ten men and a boy cannot take it away from me, I'm going to tell you who Sweeney is."

"Who is he?" the conductor queried. Already he suspected he had been outgeneralled.

"Sweeney," said Mr. Webster, "is the chief clerk in one of Chicago's most pretentious hotels and a young man who can find all the angles of a situation without working it out in logarithms. I wired him the details of my predicament; he heard the Macedonian cry and kicked in. Neat, is it not?"

The conductor grinned. "I hate to take your money," he declared.

"Don't. Just at present I'm very flush. Yes, sir, I'm as prosperous as a yearling burro up to his ears in alfalfa, and the only use I have ever found for money is to make other people happy with it, thereby getting some enjoyment out of it myself. Just as soon as I get a little chunk together, some smarter man than I takes it all away from me again—so the cleaning process might just as well start here. When I'm broke I'll make some more."

"How?"

"By remembering that all a man needs in this world, in order to excel, is about two per cent. more courage than a jack-rabbit; also that an ounce of promotion in a world of boobs is worth a ton of perspiration. Thank you for falling for my bluff."

And having wotted the which, Mr. Webster retired to his hard-won sanctuary, where he removed as much alkali and perspiration as he could, carded his long hair and whiskers, manicured his finger nails with a jack-knife, changed his shirt, provided five minutes of industry for George, with his whiskbroom and brush, and set himself patiently to await the first call to dinner.

The better to hear the dinner call Webster left his stateroom door open, and presently a pink-jowled, well-curried, flashily dressed big man, of about Webster's age, passed in the corridor, going toward the head of the train. An instant later a woman's voice said very distinctly:

"I do not know you, sir; I do not wish to know you, and it is loathsome of you to persist in addressing me. If you do not stop your annoying attentions, I shall call the conductor."

"Ah! Beauty in distress," John Stuart Webster soliloquized. "I look so much like an Angora goat I might as well butt in." He stepped to the door of his stateroom. A girl stood in the vestibule, confronting the man who had just passed Webster's door. Webster bowed.

"Madame, or mademoiselle, as the case may be," he said, "unlike this other male biped, my sole pur-

pose in presuming to address you is to suggest that there is not the slightest necessity for taking this matter up with the conductor. I am here and very much at your service."

The girl turned—and John Stuart Webster's heart flopped twice in rapid succession, like a trout newly grassed. She was as lovely as a royal flush. Her starry glance began at his miner's boots, travelled up his old, soiled, whipcord trousers, over his light blue chambray shirt and found the man behind the whiskers. She favoured him with a quick, curious scrutiny and a grave, sweet smile. "Thank you so much, sir," she answered, and passed down the corridor to the observation-car.

"Well, old-timer," Webster greeted the fellow who had been annoying her, "how about you? What do you think we ought to do about this little affair?"

"The sensible thing would be to do—nothing."

"Nothing?"

"Nothing."

"Why?"

"You might start something you couldn't finish."

"That's a dare," Webster declared brightly, "and wasn't it the immortal *Huckleberry Finn* who remarked that anybody that'd take a dare would suck eggs and steal sheep?" He caressed his beard meditatively. "They say the good Lord made man to His own image and likeness. I take it those were only the specifications for the building complete—the painting and interior decorating, not to mention the furnishings, being let to a sub-contractor." He

was silent a few seconds, appraising his man. "I suppose you commenced operations by moving into her section and asking if she would like to have the window open and enjoy the fresh air. Of course if she had wanted the window open, she would have called the porter. She rebuffed you, but being a persistent devil, you followed her into the observation-car, and in all probability you ogled her at luncheon and ruined her appetite. And just now, when you met her in this vestibule, you doubtless jostled her, begged her pardon and without waiting to be introduced asked her to have dinner with you this evening."

"Well?" the fellow echoed belligerently.

"It's all bad form. You shouldn't try to make a mash on a lady. I don't know who she is, of course, but she's not common; she's travelling without a chaperon, I take it, and for the sake of the mother that bore me I always respect and protect a good woman and whale hell out of those that do not."

He reached inside his stateroom and pressed the bell. The porter arrived on the run.

"George," said Mr. Webster, "in a few minutes we're due at Smithville. If my memory serves me aright, we stop five minutes for water and orders."

"Yassah."

"Remain right here and let me off as soon as the train comes to a stop."

When the train slid to a grinding halt and the porter opened the car door, Webster pointed.

"Out!" he said. "This is no nice place to pull off a scrap."

"See here, neighbour, I don't want to have any trouble with you——"

"I know it. All the same, you're going to have it—or come with me to that young lady and beg her pardon."

There are some things in this world which the most craven of men will not do—and the vanity of that masher forbade acceptance of Webster's alternative. He preferred to fight, but—he did not purpose being thrashed. He resolved on strategy.

"All right. I'll apologize," he declared, and started forward as if to pass Webster in the vestibule, on his way to the observation-car, whither the subject of his annoying attentions had gone. Two steps brought him within striking distance of his enemy, and before Webster could dodge, a sizzling right-handed blow landed on his jaw and set him back on his haunches in the vestibule.

It was almost a knockout—almost, but not quite. As Webster's body struck the floor the big automatic came out of the holster; swinging in a weak circle, it covered the other.

"That was a daisy," Webster mumbled. "If you move before my head clears, I'll put four bullets into you before you reach the corridor."

He waited about a minute; then with the gun he pointed to the car door, and the masher stepped out. Webster handed the porter his gun and followed; two minutes later he returned, dragging his assailant

by the collar. Up the steps he jerked the big battered hulk and tossed it in the corner of the vestibule, just as the girl came through the car, making for the diner up ahead.

Again she favoured him with that calm, grave, yet vitally interested gaze, nodded appreciatively, made as if to pass on, changed her mind, and said very gravely: "You are—a very courtly gentleman, sir."

He bowed. There was nothing else to do, nothing that he could say, under the circumstances; to use his chivalry as a wedge to open an acquaintance never occurred to him—but his whiskers did occur to him. Hastily he backed into his stateroom and closed the door; presently he rose and surveyed himself critically in the small mirror over the washstand.

"No, Johnny," he murmured, "we can't go into the diner now. We're too blamed disreputable. We were bad enough before that big swine hung the shanty on our right eye, but whatever our physical and personal feelings, far be it from us to parade our iridescent orb in public. Besides, one look at that queen is enough to do us for the remainder of our natural life, and a second look, minus a proper introduction, would only drive us into a suicide's grave. That's a fair sample of our luck, Johnny. It rains duck soup—and we're there like a Chinaman—with chopsticks; and on the only day in the history of the human race, here I am with a marvellous black eye, a dislocated thumb, four skinned knuckles, and a grouch, while otherwise looking like a cross between *Rip Van Winkle* and a hired man." He sighed, rang

for the porter and told him to send a waiter for his order, since he would fain break his fast in the privacy of his stateroom. And when the waiter came for the order, such was Mr. Webster's mental perturbation that ham and eggs were furthest from his thoughts. He ordered a steak with French fried potatoes.

CHAPTER TWO

JOHN STUART WEBSTER passed a restless night. Sleep came to him in hourly installments, from which he would rouse to ask himself whether it was worth while to continue to go through the motions of living, or alight at the next station, seek a lonely and unfrequented spot and there surrender to outrageous fortune. He had *lived* every moment of his life; fair fortune and ill had been his portion so often that he had long since ceased to care which took precedence over the other; to quote Mr. Kipling, he had schooled himself to "treat those two impostors both the same"—not a very difficult task, if one be granted a breathing spell between the arrival of each impostor! Hitherto, in Webster's experience, there had always been a decent interval between the two—say a day, a week, a month or more; whereas in the present instance, two minutes had sufficed to make the journey from a heaven of contentment to the dungeons of despair.

It was altogether damnable. In a careless moment, Fate had accorded him a glimpse of the only woman he had ever met and desired to meet again—for Webster was essentially a man's man, and his profession and environment had militated against his opportunities for meeting extraordinary women;

and extraordinary women were the only kind that could hope to challenge his serious attention. Had his luck changed there, he might have rested content with his lot—but it hadn't. Fate had gone farther. She had accorded him a signal opportunity for knightly combat in the service of this extraordinary woman; and in the absence of a formal introduction, what man could desire a finer opportunity for getting acquainted! If only their meeting had but been delayed two weeks, ten days, a week! Once free of his ugly cocoon of rags and whiskers, the butterfly Webster would not have hesitated one brief instant to inform himself of that young lady's name and address, following his summary disposal of her tormentor. Trusting to the mingled respect and confusion in his manner, and to her own womanly intuition to warn her that no rudeness or brazen familiarity was intended, he would have presented himself before her and addressed her in these words:

"A few minutes ago, Miss, you were gracious enough to accord me the rare pleasure of being of slight service to you. May I presume on that evidence of your generosity and perfect understanding to risk a seeming impertinence by presuming to address you?"

Webster pictured her as bowing, favouring him with that grave yet interested scrutiny and saying: "Certainly, sir." Whereupon he would say:

"It has occurred to me—for, like *Bimi*, the orang-outang, I have perhaps too much ego in my cosmos—that you might be charitably moved to admit me to

Now this insufferable ass is doing just what he objected to in the other man.

the happy circle of those privileged to call you by name. Were there a mutual friend on this train whom I could prevail upon to introduce me formally, I should not be reduced to the necessity of being unconventional. Under the circumstances, however, I am daring enough to presume that this misfortune is not so great that I should permit it to interfere with my respectful desires. Therefore—have I your permission to present myself, with the hope that in so doing I may feel freer to be of additional service to you throughout the remainder of our journey?"

That would be a pretty, a graceful speech—a little ornate, doubtless, but diplomatic in the extreme. Having been accorded permission to introduce himself, he would cease thereafter to be flowery. However, Webster realized that however graceful might be his speech and bearing, should he essay the great adventure in the morning, his appearance would render him ridiculous and presumptuous and perhaps shock and humiliate her; for in all things there is a limit, and John Stuart Webster's right eye constituted a deadline beyond which, as a gentleman, he dared not venture; so with a heavy heart he bowed to the inevitable. Brilliant and mysterious as a meteorite she had flashed once across his horizon and was gone.

In the privacy of his stateroom Webster had ham and eggs for breakfast. He was lighting his second cigar when the porter knocked and entered with an envelope.

"Lady in the observation-car asked me to deliver this to you, sah," he announced importantly.

It was a note, freshly written on the train stationery. Webster read:

The distressed lady desires to thank the gentleman in stateroom A for his chivalry of yesterday. She quite realizes that the gentleman's offer to relieve her of the annoyance to which she was being subjected was such a direct expression of his nature and code, that to have declined his aid would have been discourteous, despite her distress at the possible outcome. She is delighted to know that her confidence in the ability of her champion has been fully justified by a swift and sweeping victory, but profoundly sorry that in her service the gentleman in stateroom A was so unfortunate as to acquire a red eye with blue trimmings.

John Stuart Webster swore his mightiest oath, "By the twelve apostles, Simon Peter, Andrew, James, John, Philip, Bartholomew, Matthew, Thomas, James, Jude, and Simon, not omitting Judas Iscariot, the scaly scoundrel who betrayed his Lord and Master!" He searched through an old wallet until he discovered a fairly clean professional card, across the bottom of which he wrote, "*Thank you. J. S. W.*" and sent it to the no-longer-distressed lady.

"The most signal adventure of my life is now over," he soliloquized and turned to his cigar. "For the sake of my self-respect, I had to let her know I'm not a hobo! And now to the task of framing up a scheme for future acquaintance. I must learn her

name and destination; so as a preliminary I'll interview the train conductor."

He did, and under the ameliorating influence of a five-dollar bill the conductor bent a respectful ear to the Websterian message.

"In Car Seven," he began, "there is a young lady. I do not know what section she occupies; neither do I know her name and destination. I only know what she looks like."

The conductor nodded. "And you want to ascertain her name and destination?"

"I do."

"Easiest thing in life. There is only one young lady in Car Seven. I suppose you mean that queen with the olive complexion, the green suit, and——"

"Hold! Enough."

"All right. I have the unused portion of her transportation to return to her before we hit Salt Lake; her name is on the ticket, and the ticket indicates her destination. I'll make a mental note of both as soon as I've identified her ticket."

"After you've made the said mental note," Webster pleaded, "be sure you write it down, so you'll not forget."

A few hours later the conductor came to Webster's stateroom and handed him a card upon which was written:

Dolores Ruey. From Los Angeles, via San Pedro, Los Angeles & Salt Lake, to Salt Lake City. Denver & Rio

Grande to Denver, Burlington to St. Louis, Illinois Central to New Orleans. Stop-over at Denver.

John Stuart Webster studied the name after the conductor withdrew. That's a Spanish name," he soliloquized, "but for all that, she's not a parakeet. There's something Gaelic about her features, particularly her eyes. They're brown, with golden flecks in them, and if she had a drop of dark blood in her, they'd be smoky and languid. Also if she were a Latin she would have referred to my black eye—whereas she referred to a red eye with blue trimmings! Same thing but different! All things considered, I guess I'll take a chance and investigate."

CHAPTER THREE

WEBSTER'S dreams of bliss had, with very slight variation, come true as per schedule. In Salt Lake City he abandoned the beefsteak on his damaged eye for two businesslike leeches, which quickly reduced the nocturne effect around his orb, enabling him, the third day, to saunter forth among his fellowmen. By the end of the week he was a being reincarnated, and so he packed a huge new wardrode-trunk with his latest purchases and journeyed on to Denver. Coincident with his arrival there, we again take up the thread of our story.

One hour after his trunk arrived the gentleman from Death Valley might have been observed standing before a cheval glass looking long and earnestly at the reflection of his middle-aged person, the while he marked the fit of his new raiment.

Let us describe these habiliments, alleging as an excuse for dwelling with emphasis upon the subject the fact that John Stuart Webster was all dressed up for the first time in three long, labour-ridden years, and was tremendously glad of it. Hark to this inventory. There were the silken hose and underwear next his well-scrubbed skin; then there was the white pleated linen shirt—a shirt so expensive and exquisite that Mr. Webster longed to go somewhere

and shoot a game of billiards, in order that thus he might have an excuse to remove his coat and exhibit that shirt to the gaze of the multitude. His collar irked him slightly, but he had been assured by the clerk who sold it to him that it was strictly in vogue. His gray silk Ascot tie was held in a graceful puff by a scarfpin with a head of perfect crystal prettily shot with virgin gold; his black afternoon coat enveloped his wide shoulders and flanked his powerful neck with the perfection of the epidermis on a goose in the pink of condition; his gray striped trousers broke exactly right over his new "patent leather" shoes. The *tout ensemble*, as the gentleman himself might have expressed it had he possessed a working knowledge of French (which he did not), was perfect.

He "shot" his cuffs and strutted backward and forward, striving to observe his spinal column over his right shoulder, for he was in a transport of delight as truly juvenile as that on the never-to-be-forgotten day when he had attained to the dignity of his first pair of long trousers. He observed to himself that it was truly remarkable, the metamorphosis nine tailors and a talkative barber can make in an old sour-dough.

Presently, convinced that he was the glass of fashion and the mould of form, Mr. Webster took up a smart lancewood stick and a pair of new gray suede gloves and descended to the lobby of Denver's most exclusive hotel. He paused at the cigar stand long enough to fill his case with three-for-a-half perfectos and permit the young woman in charge to feast her world-weary eyes on his radiant person (which she

did, classifying and tabulating him instantly as a millionaire mining man from Nevada). After this he lighted a cigar and stepped forth into Seventeenth Street, along which he strolled until he came to a certain building into the elevator of which he entered and was whisked to the twelfth floor, where he alighted and found himself before a wide portal which bore in gold letters the words:

ENGINEERS' CLUB

The Engineers' Club was the closest approach to a home that John Stuart Webster had known for twenty years, and so he paused just within the entrance to perform the time-honoured ceremonial of home-coming. Over the arched doorway leading to the lounge hung a large bronze gong such as is used in mines, and from the lever of the gong-clapper depended a cord which Webster seized and jerked thrice—thus striking the signal known to all of the mining fraternity—the signal to hoist! Only those members who had been sojourning in distant parts six months or more were privileged thus to disturb the peace and dignity of the Engineers' Club, the same privilege, by the way, carrying with it the obligation of paying for the materials shortly to be hoisted!

Having announced the return of a prodigal, our hero stepped to the door of the lounge and shouted:

"John Stuart Webster, E. M."

The room was empty. Not a single member was present to greet the wanderer and accept of his invitation!

"Home was never like this when I was a boy," he complained to the servant at the telephone exchange. "Times must be pretty good in the mining game in Colorado when everybody has a job that keeps him out of Denver."

The servant rose and essayed a raid on his hat and stick, but Mr. Webster, who was impatient at thus finding himself amidst old scenes, fended him away and said "Shoo fly!" Then he crossed the empty lounge and ascended the stairs leading to the card room, at the entrance of which he paused, leaning on his stick—in unconscious imitation of a Sicilian gentleman posing for his photograph after his first payday in America—swept that room with a wistful eye and sighed because nothing had changed in three long years.

Save for the slight job of kalsomining which Father Time had done on the edges of the close-cropped Websterian moustache, the returned prodigal might have stepped out of the Club but yesterday. He would not have taken the short end of a modest bet that even a fresh log had been placed on the fire or that the domino-players over against the wall had won or lost a drink or two and then resumed playing —although perchance there *were* a few more gray hairs in the thickly thatched head of old Neddy Jerome, sitting in his favourite seat by the window and turning the cards in his eternal game of solitaire,

in blissful ignorance that John Stuart Webster stood within the portals of home and awaited the fatted calf.

"I'll hypnotize the old pelican into looking up," Webster soliloquized, and forthwith bent a beetling gaze upon the player. For as many as five seconds he strove to demonstrate the superiority of mind over solitaire; then, despairing of success, he struck the upholstery of an adjacent chair a terrific blow with his stick—the effect of which was to cause everybody in the room to start and to conceal Mr. Webster momentarily in a cloud of dust, the while in a bellowing baritone he sang:

> His father was a hard-rock miner;
> He comes from my home town——

"Jack Webster! The devil's own kin!" shouted Neddy Jerome. He swept the cards into a heap and waddled across the room to meet this latest assailant of the peace and dignity of the Engineers' Club. "You old, worthless, ornery, no-good son of a lizard! I've never been so glad to see a man that didn't owe me money." He seized Webster's hand in both of his and wrung it affectionately. "Jack," he continued, "I've been combing the whole civilized world for you, for a month, at least. Where the devil *have* you been?"

John Stuart Webster beamed happily upon his friend. "Well, Neddy, you old stocking-knitter," he replied quizzically, "since that is the case, I'm

not surprised at your failure to find me. You've known me long enough to have remembered to confine your search to the *uncivilized* reaches."

"Well, you're here, at any rate, and I'm happy. Now you'll settle down."

"Hardly, Neddy. I'm young yet, you know—only forty. Still a real live man and not quite ready to degenerate into a card-playing, eat-drink-and-be-merry, die-of-inanition, sink-to-oblivion, and go-to-hell fireplace spirit!" And he prodded Jerome in the short ribs with a tentative thumb that caused the old man to wince. He turned to greet the half-dozen card-players who had looked up at his noisy entrance—deciding that since they were strangers to him they were mere half-baked young whelps but lately graduated from some school of mines—and permitted his friend to drag him downstairs to the deserted lounge, where Jerome paused in the middle of the room and renewed his query:

"Johnny, where have you been?"

"Lead me to a seat, O thou of little manners," Webster retorted. "Here, boy! Remove my property and guard it well. I will stay and disport myself." And he suffered himself to be dispossessed of his hat, gloves, and stick. "It used to be the custom here," he resumed, addressing Jerome, "that when one of the Old Guard returned, he was obliged to ask his friends to indicate their poison——"

"Where have you been, I ask?"

"Out in Death Valley, California, trying to pry loose a fortune."

"Did you pry it?"

John Stuart Webster arched his eyebrows in mock reproach. "And you can see my new suit, Neddy, my sixteen-dollar, made-to-order shoes, and my horny hoofs encased in silken hose—and ask that question? Freshly shaved and ironed and almost afraid to sit down and get wrinkles in my trousers! Smell that!" He blew a cloud of cigar smoke into Jerome's smiling face. The latter sniffed. "It smells expensive," he replied.

"Yes, and you can bet it tastes expensive, too," Webster answered, handing his cigar-case to his friend—who helped himself and said:

"So you've made your pile, eh, Jack?"

"Do you suppose I would have come back to Colorado without money? Haven't you lived long enough, Neddy, to realize that when a man has money he never knows where to go to spend it? It's so blamed hard to make up one's mind, with all the world to choose from, and so the only place I could think of was the old Engineers' Club in Denver. There, at least, I knew I would find one man of my acquaintance—an old granny named Neddy Jerome. Yes, Neddy, I knew I would find you playing solitaire, with your old heart beating about seven times an hour, your feet good and warm, and a touch of misery around your liver from lack of exercise."

Jerome bit the end of his cigar and spat derisively. "How much have you made?" he demanded bluntly.

"It's none of your business, but I'll tell you because

I love you, Neddy. I've made one hundred thousand dollars."

"Chicken-feed," Jerome retorted.

Webster glanced around. "I thought at first nothing had changed in the old place," he said, "but I see I was mistaken."

"Why, what's wrong, Jack?"

"Why, when I was here before, they used to ask a man if he had a mouth—and now they ask him how much money he's made, where he made it, and—why, hello, Mose, you black old scoundrel, how do you do? Glad to see you. Take the order, Mose: some milk and vichy for Mr. Jerome, and a——"

"Yassuh, yassuh," Mose interrupted, "an' a ginger for you, suh."

"Gone but not forgotten," breathed Mr. Webster, and walled his eyes piously after the fashion of one about to say grace before a meal. "How sweet a thing is life with a club servant like old black Mose, who does things without an order. I feel at home—at last."

"Johnny," Jerome began again, "I've been combing the mineral belt of North and South America for you for a month."

"Why this sudden belated interest in me?"

"I have a fine job for you, John——"

"King's X," Webster interrupted, and showed both hands with the fingers crossed. "No plotting against my peace and comfort, Neddy. Haven't I told you I'm all dressed up for the first time in three years, that I have money in my pocket and more in bank?

Man, I'm going to tread the primrose path for a year before I get back into the harness again."

Jerome waved a deprecatory hand, figuratively brushing aside such feeble and inconsequential argument. "Are you foot-loose?" he demanded.

"I'm not. I'm bound in golden chains——"

"Married, eh? Great Scott, I might have guessed it. So you're on your honeymoon, eh?"

"No such luck, you vichy-drinking iconoclast. If you had ever gotten far enough from this club during the past fifteen years to get a breath of real fresh air, you'd understand why I want to enjoy civilization for a week or two before I go back to a mine superintendent's cabin on some bleak hill. No, sir-ee. Old Jeremiah Q. Work and I have had a falling out. I'm going on to New York and attend the opera, see all the good plays, mush around through the Metropolitan Museum of Art, drink tea, and learn to tango." Webster sighed gustily. "Lord, Neddy, how I long for the fleshpots. I've slept under the desert stars so long I want electric signs for a change. Bacon and beans and sour dough are wonderful when one hasn't something better, but I crave an omelette soufflé drenched in cognac, and the cognac afire. Yes, and I want an obsequious waiter to hurry in with it and then take a dollar tip from me afterward for all the world like he was doing me a favour by accepting it. Dad burn your picture, Neddy, I want some class! I've been listening to a dago shift-boss playing the accordeon for three years —and he could only play three tunes. Now I want

Sousa's band. I want to hive up in a swell hotel and leave a call for six o'clock—and then when they call me, I want to curse them, roll over, and go to sleep again. I've been bathing in tepid, dirty water in a redwood sluice-box, and now I desire a steam room and a needle shower and an osteopath. I've been bossing Greasers and Italians and was forced to learn their language to get results, and now I want to speak my mother tongue to my old friends. The last funny story I heard had whiskers on it when Rameses was playing hop-scotch in Memphis, Egypt, and by thunder I'm going to have a new deal all around."

"Very well, Jack. Don't excite yourself. I'll give you exactly thirty days to sicken of it all—and then I shall come and claim my property."

"Neddy, I'll not work for you."

"Oh, yes, you will, John."

"No, sir, I'm mad. I won't play."

"You're it. I just tagged you."

"I require a rest—but unfold your proposition, Neddy. I was born a poor, weak vessel consumed with a curiosity that was ever my undoing. I can only protest that this is no way to treat a friend."

"Nonsense! My own brother wants this job, and I have refused to give it to him. Business is business—and I've saved it for you."

Jerome leaned forward and laid his finger confidentially on Webster's knee; whereat the light-hearted wanderer carefully lifted the finger, brushed an imaginary speck of dirt from it, and set it down

again. "Be serious, you ingrate," Jerome protested. "Listen! I've been working for two years on a consolidation up near Telluride, and I've just put it across. Jack, it's the biggest thing in the country——"

Webster closed his eyes and crooned:

"I'm dying for some one to love me;
I'm tired of living alone;
I want to be somebody's darling,
To be queen upon somebody's throne."

"Well, you'll be king on the throne of the Colorado Consolidated Mines Company, Limited. English capital, Jack. Pay 'em 6 per cent. and they'll call you blessed. There's twenty-five thousand a year in it, with a house and a good cook and an automobile and a chauffeur, and you can come to town whenever you please, provided you don't neglect the company's interests—and I know you're not that kind of an engineer."

"Do I have to put some money into it, Neddy?"

"Not necessarily, although I should advise it. I can let you in on the ground floor for that hundred thousand of yours, guarantee you a handsome profit and in all probability a big clean-up."

"I feel myself slipping, Neddy. Nevertheless, the tail goes with the hide. I'm not in the habit of asking my friends to guarantee my investments, and if you say it's all right, I'll spread what I have left of the hundred thousand when I report for duty.

What's the news around this mortuary, anyhow? Who's dead and who's alive?"

"It's been a tremendous job getting this consolidation over, Jack. When——"

"In pity's name! Spare me. I've heard all I want to hear about your confounded consolidation. News! News! Give me news! I had to beg for a drink——"

"I might remind you that your manners have not improved with age, Jack Webster. You haven't thanked me for that job."

"No—nor shall I. Mose, you black sinner, how dare you appear before me again without that stinger?"

Mose, the aged coloured porter of the Engineers' Club, flashed a row of ivories and respectfully returned the democratic greeting.

"Letter for you, suh. The secretary told me to give it to you, Mistah Webster."

"Thank you, Mose. Speak up, Neddy, and tell me something. Ever hear anything of Billy Geary?"

He was tearing the edge of the envelope the while he gazed at Jerome, who was rubbing his fat hands together after the fashion of elderly men who are well pleased with themselves.

"You have a chance to become one of the greatest and richest mining engineers in the world, Jack," he answered, "now that you've cut loose from that young crook Geary. I don't know what's become of him, and neither does anybody else. For that matter, nobody cares."

"I do—and you can take the brief end of that bet

for your last white chip. Don't let me hear you or anybody else say anything against Billy Geary. That boy goes for my money, every turn in the box. Don't make any mistakes about that, old-timer."

Webster's face suddenly was serious; the bantering intonation in his voice was gone, and a new, slightly strident note had crept into it. But Jerome, engrossed in his own affairs, failed to observe the menace in that swift transition of mood in his companion. He waved his hand soothingly.

"All right, old Johnny Pepper-box, have it your own way. Nevertheless, I'm a little mystified. The last I knew of you two, you had testified against him in the high-grader trials at Cripple Creek, and he had pulled out under a cloud, even after his acquittal."

"Give a dog a bad name, and it will stick to him," Webster retorted. "Of course I testified against him. As engineer for the Mine Owners' Association, I had to. The high-grade ore was found in his assay office, and the circumstantial evidence was complete, and I admit Billy was acquitted merely because I and others could not swear positively that the ore came from any certain mine. It was the same old story, Neddy. It's become history in all mining camps. You can be morally certain that high-grade ore has been stolen from your mine, but unless you catch the ore thief in the act, how can you prove it? High-grade ore is blind goods and is not confined to any certain man-owned spot on this wicked earth—so

there you are! I suppose you read the newspaper reports and believed them, just as everybody else does."

"Well, forget it, Jack. It's all over long ago, and forgotten."

"It wasn't all over so long ago as you seem to think. I suppose you knew the Holman gang was afterward sent to the penitentiary for those same high-grade operations?"

"Yes."

"But I'll bet my new plug hat you never knew I was the *Hawkshaw* that sent them there! You bet I was! Billy Geary's acquittal didn't end my interest in the case—not by a jugful! I fought the case against the friends of the Holman crew *among the mine owners themselves;* and it cost me my good job, my prestige as a mining engineer, and thirty thousand dollars of money that I'd slaved to get together. They squeezed me, Neddy—squeezed me hard like a lemon, and threw me away, but I got them! I should tell a man! Of course you never knew this, Neddy, and for that matter, neither does Geary. I wish he did. We were good friends once. I certainly was mighty fond of that boy."

He drew the letter from the envelope and slowly opened it, his mind not upon the letter, but upon Billy Geary.

"And you never heard what became of Geary?"

"Not a word. I was too busy wondering what was to become of me. I couldn't get a job anywhere in Colorado, and I moved to Nevada. Made a

million in Goldfield, dropped it in the panic of 1907, and had to start again——"

"What have you been doing lately?"

"Borax. Staked a group of claims down in Death Valley. Bully ground, Neddy, and I was busted when I located them. Had to borrow money to pay the filing fees and incorporation, and did my own assessment work. Look!" Webster held up his hands, still somewhat grimy and calloused.

"How did you get by with your bluff?"

"In the only way anybody ever got by on no pair. I was a brave dog and went around with an erect tail, talking in millions and buying my tobacco on jawbone. The Borax Trust knew I was busted, but they never could quite get over the fear that I'd dig up some blacking and give them a run—so they bought me out. Two weeks ago I got a belated telegram, telling me there was a hundred thousand dollars in escrow against deeds and certificate of title in a Salt Lake City bank—so here I am."

"Somebody told me Geary had gone to Rhodesia," Jerome continued musingly, "or maybe it was Capetown. I know he was seen somewhere in South Africa."

"He left the Creek immediately after the conclusion of his trial. Poor boy! That dirty business destroyed the lad and made a tramp of him, I guess. I tell you, Neddy, no two men ever lived who came nearer to loving each other than Billy Geary and his old Jack-pardner. We bucked the marts of men and went to sleep together hungry many a time during

our five-year partnership. Why, Bill was like my own boy! Do you know, Neddy, now that I've rounded the forty-pole, I get thinking sometimes, and wish I could have married when I was about twenty years old; I might have had a son to knock around with now, while I'm still in the shank of my own youth. And if I had been blessed with a son, I would have wanted him to be just like Billy. You know, Bill tied onto me when he was about eighteen. He's rising twenty-six now. He came to me at the Bonnie Claire mine fresh from high school, and I staked him to a drill; but he didn't stick there long. I saw he was too good a boy to be a mucker all his days."

Webster smiled reminiscently and went on: "I'll never forget the day Billy challenged a big Cornish shift-boss that called him out of his name. The Cousin Jack could fight, too, but Billy walked around him like a cooper around a barrel, and when he finished, I fired the Cousin Jack and gave Billy his job!"

He chuckled softly at the remembrance. "Too bad!" he continued. "That boy had brains and grit and honour, and he shouldn't have held that trial against me. But Billy was young, I suppose, and he just couldn't understand my position. It takes the hard old years to impart common sense to a man, and I suppose Billy couldn't understand why I had to be true to my salt. He should have known I hadn't a leg to stand on when I took the stand for the prosecution—not a scintilla of evidence to present,

except that the high-grade had been found in his assay office. Jerome, I curse the day I took that boy out from underground and put him in the Bonnie Claire assay office to learn the business. How could I know that the Holman gang had cached the stuff in his shack?"

"Well, it's too bad," Jerome answered dully. He was quite willing that the subject of conversation should be changed. "I'm glad to get the right dope on the boy, anyhow. We might be able to hand him a good job to make up for the injustice. Have another drink?"

"Not until I read this letter. Now, who the dickens knew I was headed for Denver and the Engineers' Club? I didn't tell a soul, and I only arrived this morning."

He turned to the last page to ascertain the identity of his correspondent, and his facial expression ran the gamut from surprise to a joy that was good to see.

It was a long letter, and John Stuart Webster read it deliberately. When he had read it once, he reread it; after which he sat in silent contemplation of the design of the carpet for fully a minute before reaching for the bell. A servant responded immediately.

"Bring me the time-tables of all roads leading to New Orleans," he ordered, "—also a cable blank."

Webster had reread the letter before the servant returned with the time-tables. He glanced through them. "Henry," he announced, "your name is Henry, isn't it?"

"No, sir—George, sir."

"Well, August, you go out to the desk, like a good fellow, and ask the secretary to arrange for a compartment for me to New Orleans on the Gulf States Limited, leaving at ten o'clock to-morrow night." He handed the servant his card. "Now wait a minute until I write something." He seized the cable blank, helped himself, uninvited, to Neddy Jerome's fountain pen, and wrote:

William H. Geary,
Calle de Concordia No. 19,
Buenaventura,
Sobrante, C. A.

Salute, you young jackass! Just received your letter. Cabling thousand for emergency roll first thing to-morrow. Will order machinery. Leaving for New Orleans to-morrow night, to arrive Buenaventura first steamer. Your letter caught me with a hundred thousand. We cut it two ways and take our chances. Keep a light in the window for your old

Jack Pardner.

"That's a windy cablegram," Neddy Jerome remarked as the servant bore it away. "Why all this garrulity? A cablegram anywhere generally costs at least a dollar a word."

"'That's my delight of a shiny night, in the season of the year,'" quoted John Stuart Webster; "and why the devil economize when the boy needs cheering up?"

"What boy?"

"Billy Geary."

"Broke?"

"I should say so. Rattles when he walks."

"Where is he?"

"Central America."

Neddy Jerome was happy. He was in an expansive mood, for he had, with the assistance of a kindly fate, rounded up the one engineer in all the world whom he needed to take charge of the Colorado Consolidated. So he said:

"Well, Jack, just to celebrate the discovery of your old pal, I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll O. K. your voucher for the expense of bringing young Geary back to the U. S. A., and when we get him here, it will be up to you to find a snug berth for him with Colorado Consolidated."

"Neddy," said John Stuart Webster, "by my halidom, I love thee. You're a thoughtful, kindly old stick-in-the-mud, but——"

"No *if*'s or *but*'s. I'm your boss," Jerome interrupted, and waddled away to telephone the head waiter at his favourite restaurant to reserve a table for two.

Mr. Webster sighed. He disliked exceedingly to disappoint old Neddy, but—— He shrank from seeming to think over-well of himself by declining a twenty-five-thousand-dollar-a-year job with the biggest mining company in Colorado, but——

"Rotten luck," he soliloquized. "It runs that way for a while, and then it changes, and gets worse!"

CHAPTER FOUR

WHEN Jerome returned to his seat, the serious look in Webster's hitherto laughing eyes challenged his immediate attention. "Now what's gone and broken loose?" he demanded.

"Neddy," said John Stuart Webster gently, "do you remember my crossing my fingers and saying 'King's X' when you came at me with that proposition of yours?"

"Yes. But I noticed you uncrossed them mighty quick when I told you the details of the job. You'll never be offered another like it."

"I know, Neddy, I know. It just breaks my heart to have to decline it, but the fact of the matter is, I think you'd better give that job to your brother after all. At any rate, I'm not going to take it."

"Why?" the amazed Jerome demanded. "Johnny, you're crazy in the head. Of course you'll take it."

For answer Webster handed his friend the letter he had just received.

"Read that, old horse, and see if you can't work up a circulation," he suggested.

Jerome adjusted his spectacles and read:

Calle de Concordia 19,
Buenaventura,
Sobrante, C. A.

DEAR JOHN:

I would address you as "dear friend John," did I but possess sufficient courage. In my heart of hearts you are still that, but after three years of silence, due to my stupidity and hardness of heart, it is, perhaps, better to make haste slowly.

To begin, I should like to be forgiven, on the broad general grounds that I am most almighty sorry for what I went and done! Am I forgiven? I seem to see your friendly old face and hear you answer "Aye," and with this load off my chest at last I believe I feel better already.

I did not know until very recently what had become of you, and that that wretched Cripple Creek business had been cleared up at last. I met a steam-shovel man a month or two ago on the Canal. He used to be a machine-man in the Portland mine, and he told me the whole story.

Jack, you poor, deluded old piece of white meat, do you think for a moment that I held against you your testimony for the operators in Cripple Creek? You will never know how badly it broke me up when that Canal digger sprung his story of how you went the limit for my measly reputation after I had quit the company in disgrace. Still, it was not that which hurt me particularly. I thought you *believed* the charges and that you testified in a firm belief that I was the guilty man, as all of the circumstantial evidence seemed to indicate. I thought this for three long, meagre years, old friend, and I'm sorry. After that, I suppose there isn't any need for me to say more, except that you are an old fool for not saying you were going to spend your money and your time and reputation trying to

put my halo back on straight! I doubt if I was worth it, and you knew that; but let it pass, for we have other fish to fry.

The nubbin of the matter is this: There is only one good gold mine left in this weary world—and I have it. It's the sweetest wildcat I ever struck, and we stand the finest show in the world of starving to death if we tackle it without sufficient capital to go through. (You will notice that I am already—and unconsciously—employing the plural pronoun. How rapidly the old habits return with the old friendships rehabilitated!) It will take at least thirty thousand dollars, and we ought to have double that to play safe. I do not know whether you have, or can raise, sixty cents, but at any rate I am going to put the buck up to you and you can take a look.

Here are the specifications. Read them carefully and then see if there is anybody in the U. S. A. whom you can interest to the tune mentioned above. We could probably get by with thirty thousand, but I would not jeopardize anybody's money by tackling it with less.

Jack, I have a mining concession. It is low-grade—a free-milling gold vein—twelve feet of ore between good solid walls on a contact between Andesite and Silurian limestone. The ore is oxidized, and we can save ninety per cent. of the values on amalgamating plates without concentrating or cyaniding machinery. I have had my own portable assay outfit on the ground for a month, and you can take my opinion for what it is worth when I assure you that this concession is a winner, providing the money is forthcoming with which to handle it.

This is a pretty fair country, Jack—if you survive long enough to get used to it. At first you think it's Paradise; then you grow to hate it and know it for hell with the lid off; and finally all your early love for it returns and you

become what I am now—a tropical tramp! There is only one social stratum lower than mine, and that's the tropical beachcomber. I am not that—yet; and will not be if my landlady will continue to listen to my blandishments. She is a sweet soul, with a divine disposition, and I am duly grateful.

I would tell you all about the geography, topography, flora and fauna of Sobrante, but you can ascertain that in detail by consulting any standard encyclopedia. Governmentally the country is similar to its sister republics. The poor we have always with us; also a first-class, colorado-maduro despot in the political saddle, and it's a cold day indeed when two patriots, two *viva's* and a couple of old Long Tom Springfield rifles cannot upset the Sobrante apple cart. We have the usual Governmental extravagance in the matter of statues to countless departed "liberators" in all the public squares, and money is no object. It is depreciated shin-plasters, and I had to use a discarded sugar-barrel to hold mine when I arrived and changed four hundred *pesos oro* into the national currency. If a waiter brings you a jolt of hooch, you're stingy if you tip him less than a Sobrante dollar.

We have a Malicon along the bay shore and back again, with a municipal bandstand in the middle thereof, upon which the fine city band of Buenaventura plays nightly those languid Spanish melodies that must have descended to us from the Inquisition. If you can spare the cash, send me a bale of the latest New York rags and a banjo, and I'll start something. I have nothing else to do until I hear from you, save shake dice at The Frenchman's with the Presidente, who has nothing else to do except lap up high-balls and wait for the next drawing of the lottery. I asked him for a job to tide me over temporarily, and he offered me a portfolia! I could have been Minister of Finance!

I declined, from a constitutional inability, inherent in the Irish, to assimilate a joke from a member of an inferior race.

We haven't had a revolution for nearly six months, but we have hopes.

There are some white men here, neither better nor worse. We tolerate each other.

I am addressing you at the Engineers' Club, in the hope that my letter may reach you there, or perhaps the secretary will know your address and forward it to you. If you are foot-loose and still entertain a lingering regard for your old pal, get busy on this mining concession P. D. Q. Time is the essence of the contract, because I am holding on to the thin edge of nothing, and if we have a change of government I may lose even that. I need you, John Stuart Webster, worse than I need salvation. I enclose you a list of equipment required.

If you receive this letter and can do anything for me, please cable. If you cannot, please cable anyway. It is needless for me to state that the terms of division are as you make them, although I think fifty-fifty would place us both on Easy Street for the rest of our days. Do let me hear from you, Jack, if only to tell me the old *entente cordiale* still exists. I know now that I was considerable of a heedless pup a few years ago and overlooked my hand quite regularly, but now that I have a good thing I do not know of anybody with whom I care to share it except your own genial self. Please let me hear from you.

Affectionately,

BILLY.

Jerome finished reading this remarkable communication; then with infinite amusement he regarded John Stuart Webster over the tops of his

glasses as one who examines a new and interesting species of bug.

"So Billy loves that dear Sobrante, eh?" he said with abysmal sarcasm. "Jack Webster, listen to a sane man and be guided accordingly. I was in this same little Buenaventura once. I was there for three days, and I wouldn't have been there three minutes if I could have caught a steamer out sooner. Of all the miserable, squalid, worthless, ornery, stinking holes on the face of God's green footstool, Sobrante is the worst—if one may judge it by its capital city. Jack, there is an old bromide that describes aptly the republic of Sobrante, and it's so trite I hesitate to repeat it—but I will, for your benefit. Sobrante is a country where the flowers are without fragrance, the men without honour, and the women without virtue. It is hot and unhealthy, and the mosquitoes wear breechclouts; and when they bite you, you die. You get mail three times a month, and there isn't a white man in the whole Roman-candle republic that a gentleman would associate with."

"You forget Billy Geary," Webster reminded him gently.

"He's a boy. What does his judgment amount to? Are you going to chase off to this God-forsaken fever-hole at the behest of a lad scarcely out of his swaddling clothes? Jack Webster, surely you aren't going to throw yourself away—give up the sure thing I offer you—to join Billy Geary in Sobrante and finance a wildcat prospect without a certificate of

title attached. Why, Jack, my dear boy, don't you know that if you develop your mine to-morrow and get it paying well, the first 'liberator' may take it away from you or tax you for the entire output?"

"We'll have government protection, Neddy. This will be American capital, and if they get fresh, our Uncle Sam can send a warship, can't he?"

"He can—but he won't. Are you and Billy Geary of sufficient importance at home or abroad to warrant the vast consumption of coal necessary to send a battleship to protect your dubious prospect-hole? Be reasonable. What did you wire that confounded boy?"

"That I was coming."

"Cable him you've changed your mind. We'll send him some money to come home, and you can give him a good job under you. I'll O. K. the voucher and charge it to your personal expense account."

"That's nice of you, old sport, and I thank you kindly. I'll talk to Billy when I arrive in Buenaventura, and if the prospect doesn't look good to me, I'll argue him out of it and we'll come home."

"But I want you now. I don't want you to go away."

"You promised me thirty days in which to have a good time——"

"So I did. But is this having a good time? How about that omelette soufflé all blazing with blue fire, and that shower-bath and the opera and mushing through the art centres, and Sousa's band——"

"They have a band down in Buenaventura. Billy says so."

"It plays 'La Paloma' and 'Sobre las Olas' and 'La Golondrina' and all the rest of them. Jack, you'll go crazy listening to it."

"Oh, I don't want any omelette soufflé, and I had a bath before I left the hotel. I was just hearing myself talk, Neddy," the culprit protested weakly. "Let me go. I might come back. But I must go. I want to see Billy."

"You just said a minute ago you'd turned the forty-year post," Jerome warned him. "And you're now going to lose a year or two more in which you might better be engaged laying up a foundation of independence for your old age. You will get out of Sobrante with the price of a second-class ticket on a vile fruit boat, and you'll be back here panhandling around for a job at a quarter of what I am offering you. For Heaven's sake, man, don't be a fool."

"Oh, but I will be a fool," John Stuart Webster answered; and possibly, by this time, the reader has begun to understand the potency of his middle name —the Scotch are notoriously pig-headed, and Mr. Webster had just enough oatmeal in his blood to have come by that centre-fire name honestly. "And you, you poor old horse, you could not possibly understand why, if you lived to be a million years old."

He got up from his chair to the full height of his six-feet-one, and stretched one hundred and ninety pounds of bone and muscle.

"And so I shall go to Sobrante and lose all of this

all-important money, shall I?" he jeered. "Then, by all the gods of the Open Country, I hope I may! Old man, you have browsed through a heap of literature in your day, but I doubt if it has done you any good. Permit me to map out a course of reading for you. Get a copy of 'Paradise Lost' and another of 'Cyrano de Bergerac.' In the former you will find a line running somewhat thusly: 'What tho' the cause be lost, all is not lost!' And in the immortal work of Monsieur Rostand, let me recommend one little page—about fifteen lines. Read them, old money-grubber, and learn! On second thought, do not read them. Those lines would only be wasted on you, for you have become afflicted with hypertrophy of the acquisitive sense, which thins the blood, dwarfs the understanding, stunts the perception of relative values, and chills the feet.

"Let me foretell your future for the next twenty years, Neddy. You will spend about forty per cent. of your time in this lounging-room, thirty per cent. of it in piling up a bank-roll, out of which you will glean no particular enjoyment, and the remaining thirty per cent. you will spend in bed. And then some bright morning your heart-beat will slow down almost imperceptibly, and the House Committee will order a wreath of autumn leaves hung just above Number Four domino table, and it will remain there until the next annual house-cleaning, when some swamper will say, 'What the devil is this stuff here for?' and forthwith he will tear it down and consign it to the fireplace."

"Ba-a-h," growled Jerome.

"The truth hurts, I know," Webster pursued relentlessly, "but hear me to the bitter end. And then presently shall enter the club no less a personage than young John Stuart Webster, even as he entered it to-day. He will be smelling of country with the hair on, and he will glance toward Table Number Four and murmur sympathetically: 'Poor old Jerome! I knowed him good!' Did I hear you say 'Huh!' just then? I thank thee for teaching me that word. Take careful note and see I use it correctly—'*Huh!*'

"Dad burn you, Neddy, I'm not a Methuselah. I want some fun in life. I want to fight and be broke and go hungry and then make money for the love of making it and spending it, and I want to live a long time yet. I have a constitutional weakness for foregathering with real he-men, doing real he-things, and if I'm to be happy, I'll just naturally have to be the he-est of the whole confounded pack! I want to see the mirage across the sagebrush and hear it whisper: 'Hither, John Stuart Webster! Hither, you fool, and I'll hornswaggle you again, as in an elder day I hornswaggled you before.'"

Jerome shook his white thatch hopelessly.

"I thought you were a great mining engineer, John," he said sadly, "but you're not. You're a poet. You do not seem to care for money."

"Well," Webster retorted humorously, "it isn't exactly what you might term a ruling passion. I like to make it, but there's more fun spending it. I've made a hundred thousand dollars, and now I want

to go blow it—and I'm going to. Do not try to argue with me. I'm a lunatic and I will have my way. If I didn't go tearing off to Sobrante and join forces with Billy Geary, there to play the game, red or black, I'd feel as if I had done something low and mean and small. The boy's appealed to me, and I have made my answer. If I come back alive but broke, you know in your heart you'll give me the best job you have."

"You win," poor Jerome admitted.

"Hold the job open thirty days. At the end of that period I'll give you a definite answer, Neddy."

"There is no Balm in Gilead," Jerome replied sadly. "Blessed are they that expect nothing, for they shall not be disappointed."

"It's six-thirty," Webster suggested. "Let's eat. Last call for that omelette soufflé, and we'll go to a show afterward. By the way, Neddy, how do you like this suit? Fellow in Salt Lake built it for me—ninety bucks!"

But Jerome was not interested in clothing and similar foolishness. He only knew that he had lost the services of a mining engineer for whom he had searched the country for a month. He rose, dusting the cigar ashes from his vest, and followed sulkily.

Despite the evidences of "grouch" which Jerome brought to the dinner table with John Stuart Webster, he was not proof against the latter's amazing vitality and boundless good spirits. The sheer weight of the Websterian optimism and power of enjoying simple things swept all of Jerome's an-

noyance from him as a brisk breeze dissipates the low-lying fog that hides a pleasant valley, and ere the second cocktail had made its appearance, the president of the Colorado Consolidated Mines Company, Limited, was doing his best to help Webster enjoy this one perfect night snatched from the grim processional of sunrise and sunset that had passed since last he had dallied with the fleshpots—that were to pass ere he should dally with them again according to his peculiar nature and inclination.

Lovingly, lingeringly, Mr. Webster picked his way through the *hors d'œuvres*, declared against the soup as too filling, mixed the salad after a recipe of his own, served it and consumed it prior to the advent of the entrée, which if not the fashion in the West, at present, has not as yet gone entirely out of fashion. He revelled in breast of pheasant, with asparagus tips, and special baked potato; he thrilled with champagne at twelve dollars the quart, and a tender light came into his quizzical glance at sight of a brick of ice cream in four colours; he cheered for the omelette soufflé. In the end he demanded a tiny cheese fit for active service, cracked himself a peck of assorted nuts, and with a pot of black coffee and the best cigars possible of purchase in Denver, he leaned back at his ease and forgot the theatre in the long-denied delight of yarning with his old friend.

At one o'clock next morning they were still seated in the cosy grill, smoking and talking. Jerome looked at his watch.

"Great grief, Johnny!" he declared. "I must

be trotting along. Haven't been out this late in years."

"It's the shank of the evening, Neddy," Webster pleaded, "and I'm hungry again. We'll have a nice broiled lobster, with drawn butter—eh, Ned? And another quart of that '98?"

"My liver would never stand it. I'd be in bed for a week," Jerome protested. "See you at the club to-morrow afternoon before you leave, I presume."

"If I get through with my shopping in time," Webster answered, and reluctantly abandoning the lobster and accessories, he accompanied Jerome to the door and saw him safely into a taxicab.

"Sure you won't think it over, Jack, and give up this crazy proposition?" he pleaded at parting.

Webster shook his head. "I sniff excitement and adventure and profit in Sobrante, Neddy, and I've just got to go look-see. I'm like an old burro staked out knee-deep in alfalfa just now. I won't take kindly to the pack——"

"And like an old burro, you won't be happy until you've sneaked through a hole in the fence to get out into a stubble-field and starve." Jerome swore half-heartedly and promulgated the trite proverb that life is just one blank thing after the other—an inchoate mass of liver and disappointment!

"Do you find it so?" Webster queried sympathetically.

Suspecting that he was being twitted, Jerome looked up sharply, prepared to wither Webster with that glance. But no, the man was absolutely serious;

whereupon Jerome realized the futility of further argument and gave John Stuart Webster up for a total loss. Still, he could not help smiling as he reflected how Webster had planned a year of quiet enjoyment and Fate had granted him one brief evening. He marvelled that Webster could be so light-hearted and contented under the circumstances.

Webster read his thoughts. "Good-bye, old man," he said, and extended his hand. "Don't worry about me. Allah is always kind to fools, my friend; sorrow is never their portion. I've led rather a humdrum life. I've worked hard and never had any fun or excitement to speak of, and in answering Billy's call I have a feeling that I am answering the call of a great adventure."

He did not know how truly he spoke, of course, but if he had, that knowledge would not have changed his answer.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE morning following his decision to play the rôle of angel to Billy Geary's mining concession in Sobrante, John Stuart Webster, like Mr. Pepys, was up betimes.

Nine o'clock found him in the office of his friend Joe Daingerfield, of the Bingham Engineering Works, where, within the hour, he had in his characteristically decisive fashion purchased the machinery for a ten-stamp mill and an electric light plant capab' of generating two hundred and fifty horsepower two electric hoists with cable, half a dozen steel ore-buckets, as many more ore-cars with five hundred feet of rail, a blacksmithing outfit, a pump, motors, sheet-steel to line the crushing-bins and form shovelling platforms for the ore in the workings, picks, shovels, drills, and so forth. It was a nice order, and Daingerfield was delighted.

"This is going to cost you about half your fortune, Jack," he informed Webster when the order was finally made up.

Webster grinned. "You don't suppose I'm chump enough to pay for it now, do you, Joe?" he queried.

"You'll pay at least half, my son. We love you, Jack; we honour and respect you; but this stuff is going to Central America, and in the event of your

premature demise, we might not get it back. They have wars down there, you know, and when those people are war-mad, they destroy things."

"I know. But I'm going first to scout the country, Joe, and in the meantime keep all this stuff in your warehouse until I authorize you by cable to ship, when you can draw on me at sight for the entire invoice with bill of lading attached. If, upon investigation, I find that this mine isn't all my partner thinks it is, I'll cable a cancellation, and you can tear that nice fat order up and forget it. I don't intend to have you and that gang of penny-pinching card-room engineers up at the Engineers' Club remind me of the old adage that a fool and his money are soon parted."

From Daingerfield's office Webster went forth to purchase a steamer-trunk, his railway ticket and sleeping-car reservation—after which he returned to his hotel and set about packing for the journey.

He sighed regretfully as he folded his brand-new raiment, packed it in moth balls in his wardrobe-trunk, and ordered the trunk sent to a storage warehouse.

"Well, I was a giddy old bird of paradise for one night, at least," he comforted himself, as he dressed instead in a suit of light-weight olive drab goods in which he hoped to enjoy some measure of cool comfort until he should reach Buenaventura and thus become acquainted with the foibles of fashion in that tropical centre.

The remainder of the afternoon he spent among his

old friends of the Engineers' Club, who graciously tendered him a dollar table d'hôte dinner that evening and saw him off for his train at ten o'clock, with many a gloomy prophecy as to his ultimate destiny —the prevailing impression appearing to be that he would return to them in a neat long box labelled: *This Side Up—With Care—Use No Hooks.*

Old Neddy Jerome, as sour and cross as a setting hen, accompanied him in the taxicab to the station, loth to let him escape and pleading to the last, in a forlorn hope that Jack Webster's better nature would triumph over his friendship and boyish yearning for adventure. He clung to Webster's arm as they walked slowly down the track and paused at the steps of the car containing the wanderer's reservation, just as a porter, carrying some hand-baggage, passed them by, followed by a girl in a green tailor-made suit. As she passed, John Stuart Webster looked fairly into her face, started as if bee-stung, and hastily lifted his hat. The girl briefly returned his scrutiny with sudden interest, decided she did not know him, and reproved him with a glance that even passé old Neddy Jerome did not fail to assimilate.

"Wow, wow!" he murmured. "The next time you try that, Johnny Webster, be sure you're right——"

"Good land o' Goshen, Neddy," Webster replied. "Fry me in bread-crumbs, if that isn't the same girl! Come to think of it, the conductor who gave me her name told me her ticket called for a stop-over in Denver! Let me go, Neddy. Quick! Good-bye, old chap. I'm on my way."

"Nonsense! The train doesn't pull out for seven minutes yet. Who is she, John, and why does she excite you so?" Jerome recognized in his whimsical friend the symptoms of a most unusual malady—with Webster—and so he held the patient fast by the arm.

"Who is she, you ancient horse-thief? Why, if I have my way—and I'm certainly going to try to have it—she's the future Mrs. W."

"Alas! Poor Yorick, I knowed him well," Jerome answered. "Take a tip from the old man, John. I've been through the mill and I know. Never marry a girl that can freeze you with a glance. It isn't safe, and remember, you're not as young as you used to be. By the way, what's the fair charmer's name?"

"I've got it down in my memorandum book, but I can't recall it this minute—Spanish name."

"John, my dear boy, be careful," Neddy Jerome counseled. "Stick to your own kind of people——"

"I'll not. That girl is as trim and neat and beautiful as a newly minted guinea. What do I want with a Scotch lassie six feet tall and a believer in hell-fire and infant damnation?"

"Is this—a—er—a nice girl, John?"

"How do I know—I mean, how dare you ask? Of course she's nice. Can't you see she is? And besides, why should you be so fearful——"

"I'll have you understand, young man, that I have considerable interest in the girl you're going to marry. Drat it, boy, if you marry the wrong girl she may interfere with my plans. She may be a

spoil-sport and not want to live up at the mine—after you return from this wild-goose chase, dragging your fool tail behind you. By the way, where did you first meet this girl? Who introduced you?"

"I haven't met her, and I've never been introduced," Webster complained, and poured forth the tale of his adventure on the train from Death Valley. Neddy was very sympathetic.

"Well, no wonder she didn't recognize you when you saluted her to-night," he agreed. "Thought you were another brute of a man trying to make a mash. By thunder, Jack, I'm afraid you made a mistake when you shed your whiskers and buried your old clothes. You don't look nearly so picturesque and romantic now, and maybe she'll refuse to believe you're the same man!"

"I don't care what she thinks. I found her, I lost her, and I've found her again; and I'm not going to take any further chances. I wired a detective agency to pick her up in Salt Lake and trail her to New Orleans and get me all the dope on her, while I was in temporary retirement with my black eye. Brainless fellows, these amateur detectives. I'll never employ one again. I described her accurately—told them she was beautiful and that she was wearing a green tailor-made suit; and will you believe me, Neddy, they reported to me next day that their operative failed to pick her up at the station? He said three beautiful women got off the train there, and that none of them wore a green dress."

"Well, it's just barely possible she may have an-

other dress," Jerome retorted slyly. "Women are funny that way. They change their dresses about as often as they change their minds."

"Why, that's so," Webster answered innocently. "I never thought of that."

The porter, having delivered his charge's baggage in her section, was returning for another tip. Webster reached out and accosted him.

"Henry," he said, "do you want to earn a dollar?"

"Yes, sah. Yes indeed, sah.'

"Where did you stow that young lady's hand-baggage?"

"Lower Six, Car Nine, sah."

"I have a weakness for coloured boys who are quick at figures," Webster declared, and dismissed the porter with the gratuity. He turned to Jerome. "Neddy, I feel that I am answering the call to a great adventure," he declared solemnly.

"I know it, Jack. Good-bye, son, and God bless you. If your fit of insanity passes within ninety days, cable me; and if you're broke, stick the Colorado Con' for the cable tolls."

"Good old wagon!" Webster replied affectionately. Then he shook hands and climbed aboard the train. The instant he disappeared in the vestibule, however, Neddy Jerome waddled rapidly down the track to Car Nine, climbed aboard, and made his way to Lower Six. The young lady in the green tailor-made suit was there, looking idly out the window.

"Young lady," Jerome began, "may I presume to address you for a moment on a matter of very great

importance to you? Don't be afraid of me, my dear. I'm old enough to be your father, and besides, I'm one of the nicest old men you ever met."

She could not forbear a smile. "Very well, sir," she replied.

Neddy Jerome produced a pencil and card. "Please write your name on this card," he pleaded, "and I'll telegraph what I want to say to you. There'll be a man coming through this car in a minute, and I don't want him to see me here—besides which, the train leaves in half a minute, and I live in Denver and make it a point to be home and in bed not later than ten each night. Please trust me, young lady."

The young lady did not trust him, however, although she wrote on the card. Jerome thanked her and fled as fast as his fat old legs could carry him. Under the station arc he read the card.

"'Henrietta Wilkins,'" he murmured. "By the gods, one would never suspect a name like that belonged to a face like that. I know that name is going to jar Jack and cause him to seethe with ambition to change it. He'll trim the *Henrietta* down to plain *Retta*, and change *Wilkins* to *Webster!* By jingo, it *would* be strange if that madman persuaded her to marry him. I hope he does. If I'm any judge of character, Jack Webster won't be cruel enough to chain that vision to Sobrante; and besides, she's liable to make him decide who's most popular with him—Henrietta or Billy Geary. If she does, I'll play Geary to lose. However, if that confirmed

old bachelor wants to chase rainbows, I might as well help him out, since whichever way the cat jumps I can't lose. It's to my interest to have him marry that girl, or any girl, for that matter, because she'll have something to say about the advisability of kicking aside what amounts, approximately, to thirty thousand a year, in order to sink the family bankroll in a wildcat mine in the suburbs of hell. Well! Needs must when the devil drives." And he entered the station telegraph office and commenced to write.

An hour later Miss Dolores Ruey, alias Henrietta Wilkins, was handed this remarkably verbose and truly candid telegram:

Denver, Colo., Aug. 7, 1913.

Miss Henrietta Wilkins,
Lower 6, Car 9,
On board train 24.

Do you recall the bewhiskered, ragged individual you met on the S.P., L.A. & S.L. train in Death Valley ten days ago? He thrashed a man who annoyed you, but owing to a black eye and his generally unpresentable appearance, he remained in his stateroom the remainder of the trip and you did not see him again until to-night. He lifted his hat to you to-night, and you almost killed him with a look. It did not occur to him that you would not recognize him disguised as a gentleman, and he lifted his hat on impulse. Do not hold it against him. The sight of you again set his reason tottering on its throne, and he told me his sad story.

This man, John Stuart Webster, is wealthy, single, forty, fine, and crazy as a March hare. He is in love with you.

You might do worse than fall in love with him. He is the best mining engineer in the world, and he is now aboard the same train with you, en route to New Orleans, thence to take the steamer to Buenaventura, Sobrante, C. A., where he is to meet another lunatic and finance a hole in the ground. He has just refused a thirty-thousand-dollar-a-year job from me to answer the call of a mistaken friendship. I do not want him to go to Sobrante. If you marry him, he will not. If you do not marry him, you still might arrange to make him listen to reason. If you can induce him to come to work for me within the next ninety days, whether you marry him or not, I will give you five thousand dollars the day he reports on the job. Please bear in mind that he does not know I am doing this. If he did, he would kill me, but business is business, and this is a plain business proposition. I am putting you wise, so you will know your power and can exercise it if you care to earn the money. If not, please forget about it. At any rate, please do me the favour to communicate with me on the subject, if at all interested.

EDWARD P. JEROME.
President Colorado Consolidated
Mines, Limited.
Care Engineers' Club.

The girl read and reread this telegram several times, and presently a slow little smile commenced to creep around the corners of her adorable mouth, for out of the chaos of emotions induced by Ned Jerome's amazing proposition, the humour of the situation had detached itself to the elimination of everything else.

"I believe that amazing old gentleman is absolutely

dependable," was the decision at which she ultimately arrived, and calling for a telegraph blank, she wired the old schemer:

Five thousand not enough money. Make it ten thousand and I will guarantee to deliver the man within ninety days. I stay on this train to New Orleans.

HENRIETTA.

That telegram arrived at the Engineers' Club about midnight, and pursuant to instructions, the night barkeeper read it and 'phoned the contents to Neddy Jerome, who promptly telephoned his reply to the telegraph office, and then sat on the edge of his bed, scratching his toes and meditating.

"That's a remarkable young woman," he decided, "and business to her finger-tips. Like the majority of her sex, she's out for the dough. Well, I've done my part, and it's now up to Jack Webster to protect himself in the clinches and breakaways."

About daylight a black hand passed Neddy Jerome's reply through the berth-curtains to Dolores Ruey. She read:

Accept. When you deliver the goods, communicate with me and get your money.

JEROME.

She snuggled back among the pillows and considered the various aspects of this amazing contract which she had undertaken with a perfect stranger. Hour after hour she lay there, thinking over this

As she passed, John Stuart Webster looked fairly into her face, started as if bee-stung, and hastily lifted his hat

preposterous situation, and the more she weighed it, the more interesting and attractive the proposition appeared. But one consideration troubled her. How would the unknown knight manage an introduction? Or, if he failed to manage it, how was she to overcome that obstacle?

"Oh, dear," she murmured, "I do hope he's brave."

She need not have worried. Hours before, the object of her thought had settled all that to his own complete satisfaction, and as a consequence was sleeping peacefully and gaining strength for whatever of fortune, good or ill, the morrow might bring forth.

CHAPTER SIX

DAY was dawning in Buenaventura, republic of Sobrante, as invariably it dawns in the tropics—without extended preliminary symptoms. The soft, silvery light of a full moon that had stayed out scandalously late had merged imperceptibly into gray; the gray was swiftly yielding place to a faint crimson that was spreading and deepening upward athwart the east.

In the Calle Nueva a game cock, pride of an adoring family of Sobrante's lower class, crowed defiance to a neighbouring bird. A dog barked. From the patch of vivid green at the head of the Calle San Rosario a troupe of howling monkeys raised a sun-up cheer that marked the finish of a night of roystering; from wattled hut and adobe *casa* brunette women in red calico wrappers came forth, sleepy-eyed and dishevelled; and presently from a thousand little adobe fireplaces in a thousand backyards thin blue spirals of smoke mounted—incense to the household gods of Sobrante—Tortilla and Frijoles. Brown men, black men, lemon-tinted men, and white men whose fingernails showed blue instead of white at the base, came to the doors of their respective habitations, leaned against them, lighted post-breakfast cigarettes, and waited for somebody to start something.

To these indolent watchers of the dawn was vouchsafed presently the sight of Señora Concepcion Josefina Morelos on her way to early mass at the Catedral de la Vera Cruz. Men called to each other, when she passed, that Señora Morelos shortly would seek, in a Carmelite convent, surcease from the grief caused by the premature demise of her husband, Generál Pablo Morelos, at the hands of a firing-squad in the *cuartel* yard, as a warning to others of similar kidney to forbear and cease to tamper with the machinery of politics. And when Señora Morelos had passed, came Alberto Guzman with two smart mules hitched to a dilapidated street-car; came Don Juan Cafetéro, *peseta*-less, still slightly befuddled from his potations of the night before, and raising the echoes in the *calle* with a song singularly alien to his surroundings:

> Green were the fields where my forefathers dwelt—
> O, Erin, mavourneen, *slan laght go bragh!*

At the theatre we sit patiently waiting for the stage electrician to switch on the footlights and warn us that the drama is about to begin. Let us, in a broader sense, appropriate that cue to mark the beginning of the drama with which this story deals; instead of a stage, however, we have the republic of Sobrante; in lieu of footlights we have the sun popping up out of the Caribbean Sea.

Those actors whose acquaintance we have so briefly made thus far must be presumed to be supers

crossing the stage and loitering thereon while the curtain is down. Now, therefore, let us drive them into the wings while the curtain rises on a tropical scene.

In the *patio* of Mother Jenks's establishment in the Calle de Concordia, No. 19, the first shafts of morning light were filtering obliquely through the orange trees and creeping in under the deep, Gothic-arched veranda flanking the western side of the *patio*, to reveal a dusky maiden of more or less polyglot antecedents, asleep upon a bright, parti-coloured blanket spread over a wicker couch.

Presently, through the silent reaches of the Calle de Concordia, the sound of a prodigious knocking and thumping echoed, as of some fretful individual seeking admission at the street door of El Buen Amigo, by which euphonious designation Mother Jenks's caravansary was known to the public of Buenaventura. In the second story, front, a window slid back and a woman's voice, husky with that huskiness that speaks so accusingly of cigarettes and alcohol, demanded:

"*Quien es?* Who is it? *Que quiere usted?* Wot do yer want?"

"Ye might dispinse wit' that paraqueet conversation whin addhressin' the likes av me," a voice replied. "'Tis me—Cafferty. I have a cablegram Leber give me to deliver——"

"Gawd's truth! Would yer wake the 'ole 'ouse with yer 'ammering?"

"All right. I'll not say another worrd!"

A minute passed; then the same husky voice, the owner of which had evidently descended from her sleeping chamber above, spoke in a steadily rising crescendo from a room just off the veranda:

"Car-may-lee-ta-a-a!"

We can serve no useful purpose by endeavouring to conceal from the reader, even temporarily, the information that Carmelita was the sleeping naiad on the couch; also that she continued to sleep, for hers was that quality of slumber which is the heritage of dark blood and defies any commotion short of that incident to a three-alarm fire. Three times the husky voice addressed Carmelita with cumulative vehemence; but Carmelita slept on, and presently the husky voice ceased to cry aloud for her. Followed the sound of bare feet thudding across the floor.

Forth from the house came Mother Jenks, a red-faced, coarse-jowled, slightly bearded lady of undoubted years and indiscretion, in curl-papers and nightgown, barefoot and carrying a bucket. One scornful glance at the sleeping Carmelita, and mother Jenks crossed to the fountain plashing in the centre of the *patio*, filled her bucket, stepped to the veranda and dashed three gallons of tepid water into Carmelita's face.

That awakened Carmelita—Mother Jenks's raucous "Git up, yer bloody wench! Out, yer 'ussy, an' cook *almuerzo*. Gawd strike me pink, if I don't give yer the sack for this—an' sleepin' on my best new blenkit!" being in the nature of a totally unnecessary exordium.

Carmelita shrieked and fled, while Mother Jenks scuttled along in pursuit like a belligerent old duck, the while she heaped opprobrium upon Carmelita and all her tribe, the republic of Sobrante, its capital, its government officials, and the cable company. Finally she disappeared into El Buen Amigo with a hearty Cockney oath at her own lack of foresight in ever permitting her sainted 'Enery to set foot on a foreign shore.

Once inside, Mother Jenks proceeded down a tiled hallway to the *cantina* of her hostelry and opened the street door a few inches. Without the portal stood Don Juan Cafetéro, of whom a word or two before proceeding.

To begin, Don Juan Cafetéro was not his real name, but rather a free Spanish translation of the Gaelic, John Cafferty. As would be indicated by the song he was singing when first we made his acquaintance, coupled with the unstable condition of his legs, Mr. Cafferty was an exile of Erin with a horrible thirst. He had first arrived in Sobrante some five years before, as section-boss in the employ of the little foreign-owned narrow-gauge railway which ran from Buenaventura on the Caribbean coast to San Miguel de Padua, up-country where the nitrate beds were located. Prior to his advent the railroad people had tried many breeds of section-boss without visible results, until a Chicago man, who had come to Sobrante to install an inter-communicating telephone system in the Government buildings, suggested to the superintendent of the

road, who was a German, that the men made for bosses come from Erin's isle; wherefore Mr. Cafferty had been imported at a price of five dollars a day gold. Result—a marked improvement in the road-bed and consequently the train-schedules, and the ultimate loss of the Cafferty soul.

Don Juan, with the perversity of the Celt, and contrary to precept and example, forbore to curse Sobrante. On the contrary, he liked Sobrante immediately upon arrival and so stated in public—this unusual state of affairs doubtless being due to the fact that his job furnished much of excitement and interest, for his driving tactics were not calculated to imbue in his dusky section-hands a love for the new section-boss; and from the day he took charge until he lost the job, the life of Don Juan Cafetéro had been equivalent in intrinsic value to two squirts of swamp water—possibly one.

Something in the climate of Sobrante must have appealed to a touch of *laissez faire* in Don Juan's amiable nature, for in the course of time he had taken unto himself, without bell or book, after the fashion of the proletariat of Sobrante, the daughter of one Estebán Manuel Enrique José Maria Pasqual y Miramontes, an estimable peon who was singularly glad to have his daughter off his hands and no questions asked. Following the fashion of the country, however, Estebán had forthwith moved the remainder of his numerous progeny under the mantle of Don Juan Cafetéro's philanthropy, and resigned a position which for many years he had not enjoyed

—to wit: salting and packing green hides at a local *abattoir*. This foolhardy economic move had so incensed Don Juan that in a fit of pique he spurned his father-in-law (we must call Estebán something and so why split hairs?) under the tails of his *camisa*, with such vigour as to sever forever the friendly relations hitherto existing between the families. Mrs. Cafferty (again we transgress, but what of it?) subsequently passed away in childbirth, and no sooner had she been decently buried than Don Juan took a week off to drown his sorrows.

In this condition he had encountered Estebán Manuel Enrique José Maria Pasqual y Miramontes and called him out of his name—for which there appears to be little excuse, in view of the many the latter possessed. In the altercation that ensued Estebán, fully convinced that he had received the nub end of the transaction from start to finish, cut Don Juan severely in the region of the umbilicus; Don Juan had thereupon slain Estebán with a .44-calibre revolver, and upon emerging from the railroad hospital a month later had been tried by a Sobrantean magistrate and fined the sum of twenty thousand dollars, legal tender of the Republic of Sobrante. Of course he had paid it off within six months from his wages as section-boss, but the memory of the injustice always rankled in him, and gradually he moved down the scale of society from section-boss to day labourer, day labourer to tropical tramp, and tropical tramp to beach-comber, in which latter state he had now existed for several months.

While waiting to round out the brief period of existence which drink and the devil had left him, this poor human fragment had become a protégé of Ignatz Leber, an Alsatian, manager for a German importing and exporting house, and agent for the cable company. By the grace of the philanthropic Ignatz, Don Juan slept under Leber's warehouse and ate in his kitchen.

To return to Mother Jenks.

CHAPTER SEVEN

BEFORE Don Juan could even utter a matutinal greeting, Mother Jenks laid finger to lip and silenced him. "Go back to Leber's and return in an hour," she whispered. "I 'ave my reasons for wantin' that bloomin' cablegram delivered later."

Don Juan hadn't the least idea what Mother Jenks's reasons might be, but he presumed she was up to some chicanery, and so he winked his bloodshot eye very knowingly and nodded his acquiescence in the program; whereupon Mother Jenks started to close the door. Instantly Don Juan's foot was in the jamb; in a hoarse whisper he said:

"Whilst ye're askin' favours, woman dear, ye might have the kindness to ask me if I have a mouth."

"Bloomin' well I knows yer 'ave a mouth, for bloomin' well I smell yer blawsted breath," Mother Jenks retorted. However, the present was no time to raise an issue with Don Juan, and so she slipped behind the bar of her *cantina*, poured five fingers of *aguardiente*, the local brand of disturbance, and handed it to Don Juan through the crack in the door.

"Here's all the hair off your head," Don Juan Cafetéro saluted her amiably. He tossed it off at a

gulp, handed Mother Jenks the glass, and departed with a whispered promise to return in an hour.

When he had gone, Mother Jenks went behind the bar and fortified herself with her morning's morning —which rite having been performed, her sleep-benumbed brain livened up immediately.

"Gord's truth!" the lady murmured. "An' me about to turn him adrift for the lawst fortnight! Well for 'im 'e allers hadmired the picture o' my sainted 'Enery, as was the spittin' image of his own fawther. 'Evings! 'Ell's bells! But that was a bit of a tight squeak! Just as I'm fully conwinced 'e's beat it an' I'm left 'oldin' the sack, all along o' my kindness of 'eart, 'e gets the cablegram 'e's been lookin' for this two months past; an' 'e allers claimed as 'ow any time 'e got a cablegram it'd be an answer to 'is letter, with money to foller! My word, but that was touch an' go! An' yet Willie's got such a tykin' w'y about him, I might 'ave knowed 'e was a gentleman!"

Still congratulating herself upon her good fortune in intercepting Don Juan Cafetéro, Mother Jenks proceeded upstairs to her chamber, clothed herself, and adjourned to the kitchen, where Carmelita was already engaged in the preparation of the morning meal. After giving orders for an extra special breakfast for two, Mother Jenks returned to her *cantina*, and formally opened the same for the business of that day and night; while a lank Jamaica negro swept out the room and cleaned the cuspidors, she washed and polished her glassware and set her back bar in order.

To her here came presently, via the tiled hallway,

the object of her solicitude, a young man on the sunny side of thirty. At the first glance one suspected this individual to be a member of the Caucasian race; at the second glance one verified this suspicion. He was thin for one of his height and breadth of chest; in colour his countenance resembled that of a sick Chinaman. His hair was thick and wavy but lustreless; his dark blue eyes carried a hint of jaundice; and a generous mouth, beneath an equally generous upper lip, gave ample ground for the suspicion that while Mr. William Geary's speech denoted him an American citizen, at least one of his maternal ancestors had been wooed and won by an Irishman. An old panama hat, sad relic of a prosperous past, a pair of soiled buckskin pumps, a suit of unbleached linen equally befouled, and last but not least, the remnants of a smile that much hard luck could never quite obliterate, completed his attire—and to one a stranger in the tropics would appear to constitute a complete inventory of Mr. Geary's possessions. An experienced person, however, would have observed immediately that Mother Jenks's seedy guest had been bitten deeply and often by mosquitoes and was, in consequence, the proprietor of a low malarial fever, with its concomitant chills.

"*Dulce corazon mio*, I extend a greeting," he called at the entrance. "I trust you rested well last night, Mother Jenks, and that no evil dreams were born of your midnight repast of *frijoles refritos*, marmalade, and arf-an'-arf!"

"Chop yer spoofin', Willie," Mother Jenks sim-

pered. "My heye! So I'm yer sweet'eart, eh? Yer wheedlin' blighter, makin' love to a girl as is old enough to be yer mother!"

"A woman," Mr. Geary retorted sagely and not a whit abashed, "is at the apex of her feminine charms at thirty-seven."

He knew his landlady to be not a day under fifty, but such is the ease with which the Irish scatter their blarney, and such the vanity of the gentler sex (for despite Mother Jenks's assault upon Carmelita, we include the lady in that pleasing category), that neither Billy Geary nor Mother Jenks regarded this pretty speech in the light of an observation immaterial, inconsequential and not germane to the matter at issue. For Mother Jenks was the eternal feminine, and it warmed the cockles of her heart to be told she was only thirty-seven, even though reason warned her that the compliment was not garnished with the sauce of sincerity. As for Billy, the sight of Mother Jenks swallowing this specious bait, together with hook, line, and sinker, always amused him and for the nonce took his mind off his own troubles. Nevertheless, there was a deeper reason for his blarney. This morning, watching the telltale tinge of pleasure underlying the alcohol-begotten hue of the good creature's face, he felt almost ashamed of his own heartlessness—almost, but not quite.

Let us take Billy's view of his own case and view his mendacity with a kindly and tolerant eye. For two months he had existed entirely because of the leniency of Mother Jenks in the matter of credit.

He could not pay her cash, devoutly as he hoped to do some day, and he considered it of the most vital importance that in the interim he should somehow survive. Therefore, in lieu of cash he paid her compliments, which she snapped up greedily.

In the cold gray dawn of the morning after Mother Jenks always detected the bug in Billy's amber and vowed to rout him bag and baggage that very day; but when one is fond of blarney, it is hard indeed to destroy the source of it; and while Mother Jenks's courage had mounted to the point of action many a time, in the language of the sporting extra, Billy had always "beaten her to the punch"; for when instinct warned him that Mother Jenks was about to talk business, he could always rout her by declaring she was pencilling her eyebrows or rouging her cheeks.

An inventive genius was Billy. He never employed the same defensive tactics two days in succession, and when personal flattery threatened to fail him, a large crayon reproduction of the late Henry Jenks, which hung over the back bar, was a never-failing source of inspiration.

This was the "sainted 'Enery" previously referred to by Mother Jenks. He had been a sergeant in Her Brittanic Majesty's Royal Horse Artillery, and upon retiring to the Reserve had harkened to a proposition to emigrate to Sobrante and accept a commission as colonel of artillery with the Government forces then in the throes of a revolutionary attack. The rebels had triumphed, and as a result 'Enery had been sainted via the customary expeditious route; where-

upon his wife had had recourse to her early profession of barmaid, and El Buen Amigo had resulted.

However, let us return to our sheeps, as Mr. Geary would have expressed it. Seemingly the effect of Billy's compliment was instantly evident, for Mother Jenks set out two glasses and a bottle.

"I know yer a trifler, Willy Geary," she simpered, "but if I do s'y it as shouldn't, I was accounted as 'andsome a barmaid as you'd find in Bristol town. I've lost my good looks, what with grief an' worritin' since losin' my sainted 'Enery, but I was 'andsome oncet."

"I can well believe it, Mother—since you are handsome still! For my part," he continued confidentially, as with shaking hand he filled his brandy-glass, "you'll excuse this drunkard's drink, Mother, but I need it; I had the shakes again last night—for my part, I prefer the full-blown rose to the bud."

Mother Jenks fluttered like a *débutante* as she poured her drink. They touched glasses, calloused worldlings that they were.

"'Ow," said Mother Jenks, toasting the philandering wretch.

"How!" He tossed off his drink. It warmed and strengthened him, after his night of chills and fever, and brazenly he returned to the attack.

"Changing the subject from feminine grace and charm to manly strength and virtue, I've been marking lately the resolute poise of your martyred husband's head on his fine military shoulders. There was a man, if I may judge from his photograph, that would fight a wildcat."

"Oh, m'ybe 'e wouldn't!" Mother Jenks hastened to declare. "You know, Willie, I was present w'en they shot 'im, a-waitin' to claim 'is body. 'E kisses me good-bye, an' says 'e: 'Brace up, ol' girl. Remember your 'usband's been a sergeant in 'Er Majesty's Royal 'Orse Artillery, an' don't let the bloody blighters see yer cry.' Then 'e walks out front, with 'is fine straight back to the wall, draws a circle on 'is blue tunic with white chalk an' says: 'Shoot at that, yer yeller-bellied bounders, an' be damned to yer!'"

"To be the widow of such a gallant son of Mars," Billy declared, "is a greater honour than being the wife of a duke."

For the sake of 'Enery's memory Mother Jenks squeezed out a tear. Billy would have egged her on to a lachrymal flood, for he knew she would enjoy it, but at that moment entered Carmelita, to announce breakfast.

Mother Jenks, recalling her husband's last advice, declined to let even a Sobrantean girl see her weep. She composed herself instantly, filled her glass again, and pushed the bottle to Billy.

"'Ave another peg with Mother, Willie."

"I'll go you, Mother, although it's really my turn to set 'em up. I would if I had the price. However, I'm expecting action on that concession of mine pretty soon, Mother, and when I get straightened out, they'll date time in the Calle de Concordia from the spending toot I'll inaugurate. Ah, Mother," he added with a note of genuine gratitude and sincerity, "you've been awfully good to me. I don't

know what I'd have done without you." He laid his hand on her fat arm. "Mother, one of these days I'll get mine, and when I do I'm going to stake you to a nice little pub back in Bristol."

She smiled at him with motherly tenderness and shook her head. In a concrete niche in the mortuary of the Catedrál de la Vera Cruz the bones of her sainted 'Enery reposed, and when her hour came she would lie beside him. Moreover, she was a tropical tramp. She had grown to like Sobrante, for all her railing against it, and she knew she would never see the chalk cliffs of Albion again.

"Yer a sweet boy, Willie," she told him, "an' I'd trust yer for double the score, s'help me. 'Eving knows I 'aven't much, but wot I 'ave I shares freely with them I likes. I 'ave a brace o' duck heggs, 'am an' 'ot cakes, Willie, an' yer'll breakfuss with Mother. Duck heggs, 'am an' 'ot cakes, Willie. 'Ow's that? Eh, yer precious byby."

Billy's glistening eyes testified to the profundity of his feelings at the prospect of this Lucullan feast. It had been long since Mother Jenks's larder had yielded him anything more stable than brown beans, tortillas, fried onions, and an occasional dab of marmalade, and the task of filling in the corners of his appetite with free tropical fruit had long since grown irksome.

Mother Jenks preceded him into the shady side of the veranda, where ordinarily she was wont to breakfast in solitary state. Her table was set for two this morning, however, but this extraordinary

circumstance was lost sight of by the shameless Billy in the prospect of one more real meal before the chills and fever claimed their own. He flipped an adventurous cockroach off the table and fell to with fine appetite.

He was dallying with a special brew of coffee, with condensed milk in it, when the Jamaica negro entered from the *cantina* to announce Don Juan Cafetéro with a cablegram.

"A cablegram!" Mother Jenks cried. "Gord's truth! I'll wager the pub it's for you, Willie."

"I wonder! Can it be possible it's come at last?" Billy cried incredulously.

"I'd not be surprised," Mother Jenks replied. "Bob"—turning to the negro, and addressing him in her own private brand of Spanish—"give Don Juan a drink, if 'e 'asn't helped 'imself while yer back is turned, an' bring the cablegram 'ere."

Within the minute Bob returned with a long yellow envelope, which he handed Mother Jenks. Without so much as a glance at the superscription, she handed it to Billy Geary, who tore it open and read:

Los Angeles, Calif., U. S. A.,
August 16, 1913.

Henrietta Wilkins,
Calle de Concordia, No. 19,
Buenaventura,
Sobrante, C. A.

Leaving to-day to visit you. Will cable from New Orleans exact date arrival.

Dolores.

The shadow of deep disappointment settled over Billy's face as he read. Mother Jenks noted it instantly.

"Wot's 'e got to s'y, Willie?" she demanded.

"It isn't a he. It's a she," Billy replied. "Besides, the cablegram isn't for me at all. It's for one Henrietta Wilkins, Calle de Concordia, Number Nineteen, and who the devil Henrietta Wilkins may be is a mystery to me. Ever have any boarder by that name, Mother?"

Mother Jenks's red face had gone white. "'Enrietta Wilkins was my maiden nyme, Willie," she confessed soberly, "an' there's only one human as 'ud cable me or write me by that nyme. Gord, Willie, wot's 'appened?"

"I'll read it to you, Mother."

Billy read the message aloud; and when he had finished, to his amazement, Mother Jenks laid her head on the table and began to weep.

CHAPTER EIGHT

WHEN Billy Geary could reorganize himself, as it were, after the shock incident to his discovery that the cablegram was not for him after all, he turned his attention to Mother Jenks. Without quite realizing why he did so, Billy decided that fear and not grief was at the bottom of the good creature's distress, and in his awkward, masculine way he placed his arm around Mother Jenks's shoulders, shook her gently, and bade her remember that chaos might come and go again, but he, the said William Geary, would remain her true and steadfast friend in any and all emergencies that might occur.

"Gor' bless yer heart, Willie," Mother Jenks sniffled. "If this was only somethink I could hentrust to a man! But it ain't."

"Well, suppose you tell me what it is and let me be the judge," Billy suggested. "I haven't got one *centavo* to rub against the other, and on present form and past performances I'm the last man in the world to handle an affair between two women, but—I have a head on my shoulders, and nobody ever had reason to suspect that head of being empty. Perhaps, if you care to give me your confidence, I may be of service to you, Mother."

"Willie," his landlady wailed, "I dunno wot in 'ell yer ever goin' to think o' me w'en I tell ye wot I've been up to this past fifteen year."

"Whatever you've been up to, Mother, it was a kind and charitable deed—of that much I am certain," Billy replied loftily and—to his own surprise—sincerely.

"As Gord is my judge, Willie, it started out that w'y," moaned Mother Jenks, and she squeezed Billy's hand as if from that yellow, shaking member she would draw aid and comfort. "'Er nyme is Dolores Ruey."

"Any relation to the Ruey family of Buenaventura?"

"A first cousin, Willie. 'Er father was Don Ricardo Ruey, *presidente* av this blasted 'ell on earth w'en me an' my sainted 'Enery first come to Buenaventura. 'E was too good for the yeller-bellied beggars; 'e tried to do somethink for them an' run the government on the square, an' they couldn't hunderstand, all along o' 'avin' been kicked an' cuffed by a long line of bloody rotters. It was Don Ricardo as gives my sainted 'Enery 'is commission as colonel in the hartillery.

"That was all very well, you know, Willie, only Don Ricardo didn't go far enough. If 'e'd only 'arkened to 'Enery's advice an' imported a lot o' bloomin' Tommies to serve 'Enery's guns, 'im an' 'Enery never would 'ave faced that firin'-squad. Many's the time 'Enery's said to me: "'Enrietta, me 'art's broke tryin' to myke gunners out o' them blackamoors Don Ricardo gives me to serve the screw-

guns. They've been born without a sense o' distance!' Gor' bless you, Willie, my sainted 'Enery 'ad no bloomin' use for a range-finder. 'E'd cast 'is eye over the ground an' then try a shot for distance. M'ybe 'e'd be a bit short. 'A bit more elevation, *amigos*,' says 'Enery, an' tries again. This time 'e's a bit over it, m'ybe, but the third or fourth shot 'e 'as the range an' stays right on the target. But then, Willie, as 'Enery used to s'y to me: ''Enrietta, how in blazes can I serve six guns? How can a colonel of hartillery come down off 'is 'orse an do a gunner's work? It ain't dignified.'"

Billy nodded. He had heard that story so often in the past that he knew it by heart; from all he could learn the sainted 'Enery quite resembled a horse, in that he had room in his head for but one thought at a time. As a gunner-sergeant he was doubtless a loss to the British service, but as a colonel of Sobrantean artillery he had tried to forget that once he had been a gunner-sergeant!

"You've 'eard me tell," Mother Jenks continued, "'ow the rebels got 'arf a dozen Hamerican gunners —deserters from the navy—an' blew 'Enery's battery to bits 'ow the Government forces fell back upon Buenaventura, an' as 'ow w'en the dorgs begun to wonder if they mightn't lose, they quit by the 'undreds an' went over to the rebel side, leavin' Don Ricardo an' 'Enery an' m'ybe fifty o' the gentry in the palace. In course they fought to a finish; 'ristocrats, all of them, they 'ad to die fightin' or facin' a firin'-squad."

Again Billy nodded. He had heard the tale before, including the recital of the sainted 'Enery's gallant dash from the blazing palace in an effort to save Don Ricardo's only child, a girl of seven, and of his capture and subsequent execution.

"That ended the revolution," Mother Jenks concluded. "But 'ere's somethink I've never told a livin' soul. Shortly before 'Enery was hexecuted, 'e told me where 'e'd 'id the youngster—in a culvert out on the Malecon; so I 'ired a four-wheeler an' went out an' rescued the pore lamb. She'd been 'idin' there thirty-six hours an' was well-nigh dead, an' as there ain't no tellin' what a mob o' these spiggoties'll do when they're excited, I 'id 'er until the harrival o' the next fruit steamer, w'en I shipped 'er to New Orleans in care o' the stewardess. Hi 'ad 'er put in the Catholic convent there, for as 'Enery said: ''Enrietta, keep an eye on the little nipper, an' do yer damndest to see she's raised a lydy. 'Er father was a gentleman, an' you never want to forget 'e made you Mrs. Colonel Jenks.' So Hi've made a lydy out o' her, Willie: education, pianner lessons, paintin', singin', an' deportmint. After she graduated from the convent, I 'ad her take a course in the Uniwersity o' California—New Orleans wasn't 'ealthy for 'er, an' she needed a chynge o' climate—an' for the last two years she's been teachin' in the 'igh school in Los Angeles."

"And you haven't seen her in all these years?" Geary demanded.

"Not a look, Willie. She's been after me ever

since she graduated from the convent to let her come 'ome an' wisit me, but Hi've told 'er to wyte—that I'd be comin' soon to wisit her. An' now, s'help me, she won't wait no longer; she's comin' to wisit me! Gor', Willie, she's on her w'y!"

"So this cablegram would indicate," Geary observed. "Nevertheless, Mother, I'm at a loss to know why you should feel so cut up over the impending visit."

There was real fear in Mother Jenks's tear-dimmed eyes. "I cawn't let 'er see me," she wailed. "I wasn't this w'y w'en my sainted 'Enery hentrusted the lamb to me; it wasn't until awfter they hexecuted 'Enery that I commenced to slip—an' now look at me. Look at me, Willie Geary; look at me, I s'y. Wot do yer see? Aw, don't tell me I'm young an' 'andsome, for I knows wot I am. I'm a frowsy, drunken, disreputable baggage, with no heducation or nothink. I've raised 'er a lydy on account of 'er bein' born a lydy an' her father bein' good to me an my 'Enery—an' all along, hever since she learned to write me a letter, I've been 'Enrietta Wilkins to 'er, an' Mother Jenks to every beach-combin' beggar in the Caribbean tropics. I've lied to 'er, Willie. I've wrote 'er as 'ow 'er fawther, before 'e died, give me enough money to heducate 'er like a lydy——"

Again Mother Jenks's grief overcame her. "An' wot lovin' letters my darlin' writes me," she sobbed. "Calls me 'er lovin' Aunt 'Enrietta, an' me—Gor', Willie, I ain't respectable. She's comin' to see me—an' I cawn't let 'er. She mustn't know 'ow I got the

money for 'er heducation—sellin' 'ell-fire to a pack of rotten dorgs an' consortin' with the scum of this stinkin' 'ole! Oh, Willie, you've got to 'elp me. I cawn't 'ave 'er comin' to El Buen Amigo to see me, an' I cawn't ruin 'er reputation by callin' on 'er in public at the 'Otel Mateo. Oh, Gor', Willie, Mother's come a cropper."

Willie agreed with her. He patted the sinful gray head of his landlady and waited for her to regain her composure, the while he racked his agile brain for a feasible plan to fit the emergency. He realized it would be quite useless to argue Mother Jenks into the belief that she might pull herself together, so to speak, and run the risk of meeting with her ward; for the old woman had been born in the slums of London and raised a barmaid. She knew her place. She was not a lady and could never hope now to associate with one, even in a menial capacity, so there was an end to it! During the past fifteen years, the lower Mother Jenks had sunk in the social scale, even of free-and-easy old Buenaventura, the higher had she raised the one sweet note in her sordid life; not until the arrival of that cablegram did she realize that during those fifteen years she had been raising a barrier between her and the object of her stifled maternal yearnings—a barrier which, to her class-controlled mind, could never be swept away.

"She's been picturin' me in 'er mind all these years, Willie—picturin' a fraud," wailed Mother Jenks. "If she sees me now, wot a shock she'll get, pore sweetheart—an' 'er the spittin' himage ofa hangel.

And oh, Willie, while she don't remember wot I looked like, think o' the shock if she meets me! In 'er lawst letter she said as 'ow I was the only hanchor she had in life. Ho, yes. A sweet-lookin' hanchor I am—an' Hi was 'opin' to die before she found hout. I've got a hanuerism in my 'eart, Willie, so the surgeon on the mail boat tells me, an' w'en I go, I'll go like—that!" Mother Jenks snapped her cigarette-stained fingers. "I 'ad the doctor come ashore the last time *La Estrellita* was in, on account o' 'im bein' a Hamerican an' up to snuff. An' Hi've got 'ardenin' of the harteries, too. I'm fifty-seven, Willie, an' since my sainted 'Enery passed away, I 'aven't been no bloomin' hangel." She wrung her hands. "Oh, w'y in 'ell couldn't them harteries 'ave busted in time to save my lamb the 'umiliatin' knowledge that she's be'oldin' to the likes o' me for wot she's got—an' 'ow I got it for 'er."

Billy Geary had a bright idea. "Well," he said, "why not die—temporarily—if you feel that way about it? You could come back from the grave after she's gone."

But Mother Jenks shook her head. "No," she declared. "While Dolores is self-supportin' now, still, if anythink 'appened an' she was to need 'elp, 'elp is somethin' no ghost can give. Think again, Willie. Gor', lad, w'ere's yer brains—an' you with your stummick filled to bustin' with a breakfast fit for a knight o' the bawth."

"Well," Billy countered thoughtfully, "apparently there's no way of heading her off before she

takes the steamer at New Orleans, so we'll take it for granted she'll arrive here in due course. About the time she's due, suppose you run up to San Miguel de Padua for a couple of weeks and leave me to run El Buen Amigo in your absence. I'll play fair with you, Mother, so help me. I'll account for every *centavo*. I'll borrow some decent clothes from Leber the day the steamer gets in; then I'll go aboard and look over the passenger-list, and if she's aboard, I'll tell her you closed your house and started for California to visit her on the last northbound steamer—that her cablegram arrived just after you had started; that the cable company, knowing I am a friend of yours, showed me the message and that I took it upon myself to call and explain that as a result of your departure for the United States it will be useless for her to land—useless and dangerous, because cholera is raging in Buenaventura, although the port authorities deny it——"

"Willie," Mother Jenks interrupted impressively, a ghost of her old debonair spirit shining through her tears, "yer don't owe me a bloomin' sixpence! Yer've syved the day, syved my reputation, an' syved a lydy's peace o' mind. Kiss me, yer precious byby."

So Billy kissed her—gravely and with filial reverence, for he had long suspected Mother Jenks of being a pearl cast before swine, and now he was certain of it.

"I'll send her back to the United States and promise to cable you to await her there," Billy continued. "Of course, we can't help it if you and the cablegram

miss connections, and once the young lady is back in the United States, I dare say she'll have to stay there a couple of years before she can save the price of another sea voyage. And in the meantime she may marry——"

"Or that haneurism or my bally harteries may 'ave turned the trick before that," Mother Jenks suggested candidly but joyously. "In course she'll be disappointed, but then disappointment never lays 'eavy on a young 'eart, Willie; an' bein' disappointed at not seein' a person you ain't really acquainted with ain't as bad as some disappointments."

"I guess I know," Billy Geary replied bitterly. "If that cablegram had only been for me! The only thing worth while I have done in my twenty-six years of life was to accumulate the best friend a man ever had—and lose him again because I was a fool and couldn't understand things without a blueprint! Mother, if my old partner could, by some miracle, manage to marry this Dolores girl, your arteries and your aneurisms might bust and be damned, but the girl would be safe."

"M'ybe," Mother Jenks suggested hopefully, "yer might fix it up for her w'en I'm gone. From all haccounts 'e's no-end a gentleman."

"He's a he-man," Mr. Geary declared with conviction. He sighed. "John Stuart Webster, wherever you are, please write or cable," he murmured.

CHAPTER NINE

THE ancient bromide to the effect that man proposes but God disposes was never better exemplified than in the case of John Stuart Webster, who, having formulated certain daring plans for the morrow and surrendered himself to grateful slumber in his stateroom aboard the Gulf States Limited, awoke on that momentous morn to a distinct apprehension that all was not as it should be with him. His mouth reminded him vaguely of a bird-and-animal store, and riot and insurrection had broken out in the geometric centre of his internal economy.

"I believe I'm going to be too ill to eat breakfast," he told himself.

By seven o'clock this apprehension had crystallized into certainty. Webster had spent much of his life far from civilization, and as a result had found it necessary to acquire more than the layman's knowledge of rough-and-tumble surgery and the ordinary ills to which mortal is heir; consequently he was sufficient of a jack-leg doctor to suspect he was developing a splendid little case of ptomaine poisoning. He was aided in reaching this conclusion by memories of the dinner his friends had given him the night before, and at which he had partaken of a mallard

duck, killed out of season and therefore greatly to be prized. He recalled the waiter's boast that the said duck had been hung for five days and had reached that state of ripeness and tenderness so greatly desired by those connoisseurs of food whose fool philosophy has been responsible for more deaths than most doctors.

"That brute of a duck was too far gone," Mr. Webster soliloquized bitterly. "And to think I'm killed off in the mere shank of my celebration, just because I got so rich and stuck-up I had to tie into some offal to show what a discerning judgment I had in food, not to mention my distinctive appetite. I ought to be knocked on the head with something, and I hope I may be if I ever accept any man's judgment in opposition to my own, on the subject of ripe mallards. This is what comes of breaking the game laws."

He decided presently to go into executive session with the sleeping-car conductor, who wired ahead for a doctor to meet the train at the next station. And when the sawbones came and pawed Jack Webster over, he gravely announced that if the patient had the slightest ambition to vote at the next Presidential election, he should leave the train at St. Louis and enter a hospital forthwith. To this heart-breaking program Webster entered not the slightest objection, for when a man is seriously ill, he is in much the same position as a politician—to wit: he is in the hands of his friends. A sick man is always very sick—or thinks he is, which amounts to the same thing;

and as a rule he thinks of little else save how sick he is. John S. Webster was, in this respect, neither better nor worse than others of his sex, and in his great bodily and mental depression his plans of the night before for getting acquainted with Dolores Ruey occurred to him now as something extremely futile and presumptuous. That young lady was now the subject least in his mind, for she was at most naught but a bright day-dream; whereas his friend Billy Geary was down in Sobrante with a rich wildcat mine waiting to be developed, while the source of development lay on a bed of pain assailed by secret apprehensions that all was over!

"Poor Billy-boy!" the sufferer murmured. "He'll wait and wait, and his old Jack-partner won't come! Damn that duck!"

He had one little stab of pain higher up, and around his heart, as they carried him off the train at St. Louis and stowed him in an ambulance thoughtfully provided for by telegraph. In a nebulous way it occurred to him that Fate had again crossed her fingers when paradise loomed on the horizon; but recalling how very ill he was, he damned the duck. He told himself that even if he should survive (which wasn't possible), there could be no doubt in his mind, after all he had been through, that the good Lord had marked him for a loveless, friendless, childless man; that it was useless to struggle against the inevitable. He felt very, very sorry for himself as the orderlies tucked him into bed and a nurse thrust a thermometer under his tongue.

"A hundred and four and a quarter," he heard her murmur to the doctor a few minutes later.

"No bird ever flew so high that he didn't come down to roost," said Mr. Webster aloud.

The doctor and the nurse exchanged knowing glances. They nodded. The patient was already delirious—a bad sign.

"Hey, Doc," the stricken man called. They bent over him. "Send—cablegram to Billy Geary—tell him—come home—before that thousand—spent—money—my pocket."

"Yes, I hear you," the nurse said soothingly. "And the address?"

"Calle de Concordia, Nineteen, Buenaventura, Sobrante."

"Say it again," the nurse urged him. "Spell it." Poor girl! She was a native of St. Louis. If Jack Webster had mentioned Ossawatomie or Canandaigua, he would not have been called upon to go into details and waste his strength. He gasped and wet his lips; she bent to get the message:

"Damn that duck," he whispered. "She had a green tailor-made suit, and—believe me, girl, I'd rather sell my Death Valley—borax-claims than—work them myself. Free-milling gold—catch it on amalgamating plates—contact between andesite and—Silurian limestone—Billy knows ducks. I taught him myself. Come, Neddy. All together now, you old—pelican. A little close harmony, boys:

"Let go the peak halyards,
Let go the peak halyards,

My finger is caught in the block!
Leggo!"

"Sounds like a drinking man," the doctor observed. "If that's the case, this attack will go hard with him."

It did. However, life had the habit of going hard with Webster so frequently that fortunately he was trained to the minute, and after three days of heroic battling the doctor awarded Jack the decision. Thereafter they kept him in the hospital ten days longer, "feeding him up" as the patient expressed it —at the end of which period Webster, some fifteen pounds lighter and not quite so fast on his feet as formerly, resumed his journey toward New Orleans.

In the meantime, however, several things had happened. To begin, Dolores Ruey spent two days wondering what had become of her quondam knight of the whiskers—at the end of which period she arrived in New Orleans with the conviction strong upon her that while her hero might be as courageous as a wounded lion when dealing with men, he was the possessor, when dealing with women, of about two per cent. less courage than a cottontail rabbit. She reproached herself for the wintry glance she had cast upon the poor fellow that night at the Denver railway station; she decided that the amazing Neddy Jerome was an interfering, impudent old fool and that she had done an unmaidenly and brazen deed in replying to his ridiculous telegram, even though she did so under an assumed name. Being a very human young lady, however, she could not help wondering what

had become of the ubiquitous Mr. Webster, although the fact that he had mysteriously disappeared from the train en route to New Orleans did not perturb her one half so much as it had the disappearee! She had this advantage over that unfortunate man. Whereas he did not know she was bound for Buenaventura, she knew he was; hence, upon arrival in New Orleans she dismissed him from her thoughts, serene in abiding faith that sooner or later her knight would appear, like little *Bo-Peep's* lost sheep, dragging his tail behind him, so to speak. The only regret she entertained arose from her disappointment in the knowledge of his real character, and its wide variance from the heroic attributes with which she had endowed him. She had depended upon him to be a daring devil—and he had failed to toe the scratch!

Dolores spent a week in New Orleans renewing schoolgirl friendships from her convent days in the quaint old town. This stop-over, together with the one in Denver, not having been taken into consideration by Mr. William Geary when he and Mother Jenks commenced to speculate upon the approximate date of her arrival in Buenaventura, resulted in the premature flight of Mother Jenks to San Miguel de Padua, a fruitless visit on the part of Billy aboard the *Cacique*, of the United Fruit Company's line, followed by a hurry call to Mother Jenks to return to Buenaventura until the arrival of the next steamer.

This time Billy's calculations proved correct, for Dolores did arrive on that steamer. It is also worthy of remark here that shortly after boarding the vessel

and while *La Estrellita* was snoring down the Mississippi, Miss Dolores did the missing Webster the signal honour of scanning the purser's passenger list in a vain search for his name.

At Buenaventura the steamer anchored in the roadstead; the port doctor came aboard, partook of his customary drink with the captain, received a bundle of the latest American newspapers and magazines, nosed around, asked a few perfunctory questions, and gave the vessel pratique. Immediately she was surrounded by lighters manned by clamorous, half-naked Sobranteans, each screaming in a horrible patois of English, Spanish, and good American slang perfervid praises of the excellence of his service compared with that of his neighbour. Dolores was particularly interested in the antics of one fellow who had a sign tacked on a short signal mast in his lighter. "I am a poor man with a large family, and my father was an American," the legend ran. "Kind-hearted Americans will patronize me to the exclusion of all others."

Dolores had made up her mind to heed this pathetic appeal, when she observed a gasolene launch shoot up to the landing at the foot of the companion-ladder and discharge a well-dressed, youthful white man. As he came up the companion, the purser recognized him.

"Howdy, Bill," he called.

"Hello, yourself," Mr. William Geary replied, and Dolores knew him for an American. "Do you happen to have as a passenger this trip a large, interest-

ing person, by name John Stuart Webster?" added Billy Geary.

"I don't know, Billy. I'll look over the passenger-list."

"No hope," Billy replied mournfully. "If Jack Webster was aboard he'd have got acquainted with you. However, take a look-see to make certain."

"Friend of yours?" the purser queried.

"You bet. Likewise guide and philosopher. He should have been here on the last steamer—cabled me he was coming, and I haven't heard a word from him since. I'm a little worried."

"I'll get the list," the purser announced, and together they moved off toward his office. Dolores followed, drawn by the mention of that magic name Webster, and paused n front of the purser's office to lean over the rail, ostensibly to watch the *cargadores* in their lighters clustering around the great ship, but in reality to learn more of the mysterious Webster.

"Blast the luck," Billy Geary growled, "the old sinner isn't here. Gosh, that's worse than having a note called on a fellow. By the way, do you happen to have a Miss Dolores Ruey aboard?"

Dolores pricked up her little ears. What possible interest could this stranger have in her goings or comings?

"You picked a winner this time, Bill," she heard the purser say. "Stateroom Sixteen, boat-deck, starboard side. You'll probably find her there, packing to go ashore."

"Thanks," Billy replied and stepped out of the purser's office. Dolores turned and faced him.

"I am Miss Ruey," she announced. "I heard you asking for me." Her eyes carried the query she had not put into words: "Who are you, and what do you want?" Billy saw and understood, and on the instant a wave of desolation surged over him.

So this was the vision he had volunteered to meet aboard *La Estrellita*, and by specious lie and hypocritic mien, turn her back from the portals of Buenaventura to that dear old United States, which, Billy suddenly recalled with poignant pain, is a sizable country in which a young lady may very readily be lost forever. At the moment it occurred to Mr. Geary that the apotheosis of rapture would be a midnight stroll in the moonlight along the Malecon, with the little waves from the Caribbean lapping and gurgling against the beach, while afar, in some bosky retreat, a harp with a flute obbligato sobbed out "'Nita, Juanita" or some equally heart-throb ballad. Yes, that would be quite a joyous journey—with Dolores Ruey.

Billy, with the quick eye of youth, noted that Dolores was perfectly wonderful in a white flannel skirt and jacket, white buck boots, white panama hat with a gorgeous puggaree, a mannish little linen collar, and a red four-in-hand tie. From under that white hat peeped a profusion of crinkly brown hair with a slightly reddish tinge to it; her eyes were big and brown and wide apart, with golden flecks in them; their glance met Billy's hungry gaze simply,

directly, and with a curiosity there was no attempt to hide. Her complexion was that peculiar shade of olive, with a warm, healthy, underlying tinge that nobody could possibly hope to describe, but which fits in so beautifully with brown eyes of a certain shade. Her nose was patrician; her beautiful short upper lip revealed the tips of two perfect, milk-white front teeth: she was, Billy Geary told himself, a goddess before whom all low, worthless, ornery fellows like himself should grovel and die happy, if perchance she might be so minded as to walk on their faces! He was aroused from his critical inventory when the houri spoke again:

"You haven't answered my question, sir!"

"No," said Billy, "I didn't. Stupid of me, too. I was staring, instead—because, you see, it isn't often we poor expatriated devils down here climb out of Hades long enough to view the angels! However, come to think of it, you didn't ask me any question. You looked it. My name is Geary—William H. Geary, by profession a mining engineer and by nature an ignoramus, and I have called to deliver some disappointing news regarding Henrietta Wilkins."

"Is she——"

"She is. Very much alive and in excellent health—or rather was, the last time it was my pleasure and privilege to call on the dear lady. But she isn't in Buenaventura now." Mentally Billy asked God to forgive him his black-hearted treachery to this winsome girl. He loathed the task he had planned and foisted upon himself, and nothing but the memory of

Mother Jenks's manifold kindnesses to him in a day, thanks to Jack Webster, now happily behind him, could have induced him to go through to the finish. Mentally clinging to the memory of his obligations to Mother Jenks, Billy ruthlessly smothered his finer instincts and with breaking heart prepared to do or die.

"Why, where is she?" Dolores queried, and Billy could have wept at the fright in those lovely brown eyes.

He waved his hand airily. "*Quien sabe?*" he said. "She left three weeks ago for New Orleans to visit you. I dare say you passed each other on the road—here, here, Miss Ruey, don't cry. By golly, this is a tough one, I know, but be brave and we'll save something out of the wreck yet."

He took a recess of three minutes, while Dolores dabbed her eyes and went through sundry other motions of being brave. Then he proceeded with his nefarious recital.

"When your cablegram arrived, Miss Ruey, naturally Mrs. Wilkins was not here to receive it, and as I was the only person who had her address, the cable-agent referred it to me. Under the circumstances, not knowing where I could reach you with a cable informing you that Mrs. Wilkins was headed for California to see you, I had no other alternative but let matters take their course. I decided you might arrive on *La Estrellita*, so I called to welcome you to our thriving little city, and, as a friend of about two minutes' standing, to warn you away from it."

Billy's mien, as he voiced this warning, was so singularly mysterious that Dolores's curiosity was aroused instantly and rose superior to her grief. "Why, what's the matter?" she demanded.

Billy looked around, as if fearful of being overheard. He lowered his voice. "We're going to have one grand little first-class revolution," he replied. "It's due to bust almost any night now, and when it does, the streets of San Buenaventura will run red with blood. I shudder to think of the fate that might befall you, alone and unprotected in the city, in such event."

Dolores blanched. "Oh, dearie me," she quavered. "Do they still have revolutions here? You know, Mr. Geary, my poor father was killed in one."

"Yes, and the same old political gang that shot him is still on deck," Billy warned her. "It would be highly dangerous for a Ruey, man or woman, to show his or her nose around Buenaventura about now. Besides, Miss Ruey, that isn't the worst," he continued, for a whole-hearted lad was Billy, who never did anything by halves. While he was opposed to lies and liars on broad, general principles, nevertheless whenever the exigencies of circumstance compelled him to backslide, his Hibernian impulsiveness bade him spin a yarn worth while. "The city is reeking with cholera," he declared.

"Cholera!" Dolores's big brown eyes grew bigger with wonder and concern. "Are there any other fatal diseases prevalent, Mr. Geary?"

"Well, we're not advertising it, Miss Ruey, but if

I had an enemy to whom I wanted to slip a plain or fancy case of bubonic plague, I'd invite him to visit me at Buenaventura."

"How strange the port authorities didn't warn us at New Orleans!" Dolores suggested.

"Tish! Tush! Fiddlesticks and then some. The fruit company censors everything, Miss Ruey, and the news doesn't get out. The port authorities here would never admit the truth of such reports, because it would be bad for business——"

"But the port doctor just said the passengers could go ashore."

"What's a human life to a doctor? Besides, he's on the slush-fund pay-roll and does whatever the higher-ups tell him. You be guided by what I tell you, Miss Ruey, and do not set foot on Sobrantean soil. Even if you had a guarantee that you could escape alive, there isn't a hotel in the city you could afford to sleep in; Miss Wilkins's house is closed up, and Miss Wilkins's servants dismissed, and—er—well, if you stay aboard *La Estrellita*, you'll have your nice clean stateroom, your well-cooked meals, your bath, and the attentions of the stewardess. The steamer will be loaded in two days; then you go back to New Orleans, and by the time you arrive there I'll have been in communication by cable with Mother Jenks—I mean——"

"Mother who?" Dolores demanded.

"A mere slip of the tongue, Miss Ruey. I was thinking of my landlady. I meant Mrs. Wilkins——"

"You mean Miss Wilkins," Dolores corrected him smilingly.

"So I do. Of course, Miss Wilkins. Well, I'll cable her you're on your way back, and if you'll leave me your New Orleans address, I'll have her get in touch with you, and then you can have your nice little visit far from the madding crowd's ignoble strife and the death-dealing sting of the yellow-fever mosquito."

"I'm so awfully obliged to you, Mr. Geary. You're so kind, I'm sure I'd be a most ungrateful girl not to be guided by you accordingly. You wouldn't risk any friend of yours in this terrible place, would you, Mr. Geary?"

"Indeed, I would not. By permitting anybody I thought anything of to come to this city, I should feel guilty of murder."

"I'm sure you would, Mr. Geary. Nevertheless, there is one point that is not quite clear in my mind, and I wish you'd explain——"

"Command me, Miss Ruey."

"If this is such a frightful place, why are you so anxious, if I may employ such language, to hornswoggle your dearest friend, Mr. John S. Webster, into coming down here? Do you want to kill him and get his money—or what?"

Billy's face flamed at thought of the embarrassing trap his glib tongue had led him into. He cursed himself for a star-spangled jackass, and while he was engaged in this interesting pastime Dolores spoke again.

"And by the way, which is it? Miss Wilkins or Mrs.? You've called her both, and when I reminded you she was a Miss, you agreed with me, whereas she is nothing of the sort. She's a Mrs. Then you blurted out something about a Mother Jenks, and finally, Mr. Geary, it occurs to me that for a complete stranger you are unduly interested in my welfare. I'm not such a goose as to assimilate your weird tales of death from disease. I might have accepted the revolution, because I know it's the national outdoor sport down here, and I might have eccepted the cholera, because it wouldn't surprise me; but when you so artlessly throw in bubonic plague and yellow fever for good measure, Mr. Geary, you tax my credulity. It occurs to me that if your friend John S. Webster can risk Buenaventura, I can also."

"You—you know that old tarantula?" Billy gasped. "Why I—I came out to warn him off the grass, too."

Dolores walked a step closer to Billy and eyed him disapprovingly. "I'm so sorry I can't believe that statement," she replied. "With the exception of your tendency toward fiction, you're rather a presentable young man, too. It's really too bad, but it happens that I was standing by the companion-ladder when you came aboard and spoke to the purser; when you asked him if Mr. Webster was aboard, your face was alight with eagerness and anticipation, but when you had reason to believe he was not aboard, you looked so terribly disappointed I felt sorry for you."

"Well, of course I would have been delighted to meet the old boy," Billy began, but she interrupted him.

"Mr. Geary, you're about as reliable as a Los Angeles thermometer—and if you've ever lived in a town the main asset of which is climate, you know just how reliable you are. Now, let us understand each other, Mr. Geary: If you think I'm the kind of simple, trusting little country maid who would come within half a mile of the land of her birth and then run back home because somebody said 'Boo!' you are not nearly so intelligent as you look. I'm going ashore, if it's the last act of my life, and when I get there I'm going to interview the cable agent; then I'm going to call at the steamship office and scan the passenger list of the last three north-bound steamers, and if I do not find Henrietta Wilkins's name on one of those passenger lists I'm going up to Calle de Concordia Number Nineteen——"

"I surrender unconditionally," groaned Billy. "I'm a liar from beginning to end. I overlooked my hand. I forgot that while you were born in this country and bred from several generations of Sobranteans, you were raised in the U. S. A. I beg of you to believe me, however, when I tell you that I only told you those whoppers because I was in honour bound to tell them. Personally, I don't want you to go away—at least, not until I'm ready to go away, too! Miss Ruey, my nose is in the dust. On my lying head there is a ton of ashes and a thousand running yards of sackcloth. There is a fever in my brain and a misery in my heart——"

"And contrition in your face," she interrupted him laughingly. "You're forgiven, Mr. Geary—on one condition."

"Name it," he answered.

"Tell me everything from beginning to end."

So Billy told her, for there are some women in this world to whom a man with a poker face, the imagination of a Verne, and the histrionic art of an Irving cannot—nay, dare not—tell a lie. "I would much rather have been visited with a plague of boils, like our old friend, the late Job, than have to tell you this, Miss Ruey," Bill concluded his recital. "Man proposes, but God disposes, and you're here and bound to learn the truth sooner or later. Mother isn't a lady and she knows it, but take it from me, Miss Ruey, she's a grand old piece of work. She's a scout—a ring-tailed sport—a regular individual and game as a gander."

"In other words," Dolores replied smilingly, "she has a heart of gold."

"Twenty-four carat, all wool and a yard wide," Billy declared, mixed-metaphorically.

"And I mustn't call at El Buen Amigo, Mr. Geary?"

"Perish the thought! Mother must call on you. El Buen Amigo is what you might term a hotel for tropical tramps of the masculine sex. Nearly all of Mother's guests have a past, you know. They're the submerged white tenth of Sobrante."

"Then my benefactor must call to see me here?" Billy nodded. "When will you bring her here?"

Billy reflected that Mother Jenks had been up rather late the night before and that trade in the *cantina* of El Buen Amigo had been unusually brisk; so since he desired to exhibit the old lady at her best, he concluded it might be well to spar for wind.

"To-morrow at ten," he declared. Dolores inclined her head. Something told her she had better leave all future details to the amiable William.

"I take it you are a guest at El Buen Amigo, Mr. Geary," she continued.

"Oh, yes. I've been a guest for about two weeks now; before that I was an encumbrance. Now I'm paying my way—thanks to an old side-kicker of mine, Jack Webster."

"But surely you're not a tropical tramp, Mr. Geary?"

"I was, but Jack Webster reformed me," Billy answered quizzically. "You know—power of wealth and all that."

"I remember you inquired for your friend Mr. Webster when you came aboard the steamer."

"I remember it, too," Billy countered ruefully. "I can't imagine what's become of him. I suppose I'll have a cable from him any day, though, telling me he'll be along on the next steamer. Miss Ruey, did you ever go to meet the only human being in the world and discover that for some mysterious reason he had failed to keep the appointment? If you ever have, you'll know just how cheerful I felt when I didn't find Jack's name on the passenger list. Miss

Ruey, you'll have to meet old John Stuart the minute he lights in Buenaventura. He's some boy."

"*Old* John Stuart?" she queried. "How old?"

"Oh, thirty-nine or forty on actual count, but one of the kind that will live to be a thousand and then have to be killed with an axe. He's coming to Sobrante to help me put over a mining deal."

"How interesting, Mr. Geary! No wonder you were disappointed."

The last sentence was a shaft deliberately launched; to Dolores's delight it made a keyhole in Billy Geary's heart.

"Don't get me wrong, Miss Ruey," he hastened to assure her. "I have a good mine, but I'd trade it for a hand-shake from Jack! The good Lord only published one edition of Jack, and limited the edition to one volume; then the plates were melted for the junk we call the human race."

"Oh, do tell me all about him," Dolores pleaded. Billy, always interested in his favourite topic, beamed with boyish pleasure. "No," he said, "I'll not tell you about him, Miss Ruey. I'll just let him speak for himself. We used to be as close to each other as peas in a pod, back in Colorado, and then I made a monkey of myself and shook old Jack without even saying good-bye. Miss Ruey, my action didn't even dent his friendship for me. Two weeks ago, when I was sick and penniless and despairing, the possessor of a concession on a fortune but without a *centavo* in my pockets to buy a banana, when I was a veritable beach-comber and existing on the charity of Mother

Jenks, I managed finally to communicate with old Jack and told him where I was and what I had. There's his answer, Miss Ruey, and I'm not ashamed to say that when I got it I cried like a kid." And Billy handed her John Stuart Webster's remarkable cablegram, the receipt of which had, for Billy Geary, transformed night into day, purgatory into paradise. Dolores read it.

"No wonder you love him," she declared, and added artlessly: "His wife must simply adore him."

"'He has no wife to bother his life, so he paddles his own canoe,'" Billy recited. "I don't believe the old sour-dough has ever been in love with anything more charming than the goddess of fortune. He's womanproof."

"About Mrs. Jenks," Dolores continued, abruptly changing the subject. "How nice to reflect that after she had trusted you and believed in you when you were penniless, you were enabled to justify her faith.'

"You bet!" Billy declared. "I feel that I can never possibly hope to catch even with the old Samaritan, although I did try to show her how much I appreciated her."

"I dare say you went right out and bought her an impossible hat," Dolores challenged roguishly.

"No, I didn't—for a very sufficient reason. Down here the ladies do not wear hats. But I'll tell you what I did buy her, Miss Ruey—and oh, by George, I'm glad now I did it. She'll wear them to-morrow when I bring her to see you. I bought her a new

"Mr. William H. Geary," the girl remarked that night, "I know now why your friend Mr. Webster sent that cablegram. I think you're a scout, too"

black silk dress and an old lace collar, and a gold breast-pin and a tortoise-shell hair comb and hired an open carriage and took her for an evening ride on the Malecon to listen to the band concert."

"Did she like that?"

"She ate it up," Billy declared with conviction. "I think it was her first adventure in democracy."

Billy's pulse was still far from normal when he reached El Buen Amigo, for he was infused with a strange, new-found warmth that burned like malarial fever but wasn't. He wasted no preliminaries on Mother Jenks, but bluntly acquainted her with the facts in the case.

Mother Jenks eyed him a moment wildly. "Gord's truth!" she gasped; she reached for her favourite elixir, but Billy got the bottle first.

"Nothing doing," he warned this strange publican. "Mother, you're funking it—and what would your sainted 'Enery say to that? Do you want that angel to kiss you and get a whiff of this brandy?"

Mother Jenks's eyes actually popped. "Gor', Willie," she gasped, "'aven't Hi told yer she's a lydy! Me kiss the lamb! Hi trusts, Mr. Geary, as 'ow I knows my plyce an' can keep it."

"Yes, I know," Billy soothed the frightened old woman, "but the trouble is Miss Dolores doesn't know hers—and something tells me if she does, she'll forget it. She'll take you in her arms and kiss you, sure as death and taxes."

And she did! "My lamb, my lamb," sobbed Mother Jenks the next morning, and rested her old

cheek, with its rum-begotten hue, close to the rose-tinted ivory cheek of her ward. "Me—wot I am—an' to think——"

"You're a sweet old dear," Dolores whispered, patting the gray head; "and I'm going to call you Mother."

"Mr. William H. Geary," the girl remarked that night, "I know now why your friend Mr. Webster sent that cablegram. I think you're a scout, too."

For reasons best known to himself Mr. Geary blushed furiously. "I—I'd better go and break the news to Mother," he suggested inanely. She held out her hand; and Billy, having been long enough in Sobrante to have acquired the habit, bent his malarial person over that hand and kissed it. As he went out it occurred to him that had the lobby of the Hotel Mateo been paved with eggs, he must have floated over them like a wraith, so light did he feel within.

CHAPTER TEN

WEBSTER reached New Orleans at the end of the first leg of his journey, to discover that in the matter of sailings he was not fortunate. He was one day late to board the *Atlanta* —a banana boat of the Consolidated Fruit Company's line plying regularly between New Orleans and that company's depots at Limon and San Buenaventura—which necessitated a wait of three days for the steamer *La Estrellita* of the Caribbean Mail Line, running to Caracas and way ports.

This delay annoyed him, for he was the kind of man who, once he has made up his mind to embark upon a venture, is impatient to be up and doing. Accordingly, he decided to visit the ticket office of the Caribbean Mail Line immediately and avoid the rush in case the travel should be heavy—in which event a delay of an hour might be fatal—for should he be informed that the space on *La Estrellita* was entirely sold out, the knowledge would, he knew, set his reason tottering on its throne.

The steamship office was in Canal Street. Webster arrived there during the luncheon hour, due to which fact he found but one clerk on duty at the ticket counter when he entered. This clerk was waiting on two well-dressed and palpably low-bred sons of

the tropics, to whom he had just displayed a passenger list which the two were scanning critically. Their interest in it was so obvious that unconsciously Webster peeped over their shoulders (no difficult task for one of his stature) and discovered it to be the passenger list of the steamer *La Estrellita*. They were conversing together in low tones and Webster, who had spent many years of his life following his profession in Mexico, recognized their speech as the bastard Spanish of the peon.

The clerk glanced up, caught Webster's eye and nodded to indicate that he would attend him directly.

"No hurry, old timer," Webster told him, with the bluff, free-and-easy democracy of the man of broad, unkenned horizons. "Just save a place on that passenger list for my John Hancock when our friends here have finished with it."

He sat down in the long wall seat and waited until the pair, having completed their scrutiny of the list, turned to pass out. He glanced at them casually.

Theirs were faces ordinary enough south of the Rio Grande but not likely to pass unnoticed in a northern crowd. One was a tall thin man whose bloodshot eyes were inclined to "pop" a little—infallible evidence in the Latin-American that he is drinking more hard liquor than is good for him. He was smooth-shaven, of pronounced Indian type, and wore considerable expensive jewellery.

His companion was plainly of the same racial stock, although Webster suspected him of a slight admixture of negro blood. He was short, stocky,

and aggressive looking; like his companion, bejewelled and possessed of a thin, carefully cultivated moustache that seemed to consist of about nineteen hairs on one side and twenty on the other. Evidently once upon a time, as the story books have it, he had been shot. Webster suspected a Mauser bullet, fired at long range. It had entered his right cheek, just below the malar, ranged downward through his mouth and out through a fold of flabby flesh under his left jowl. It must have been a frightful wound, but it had healed well except at the point of entrance, where it had a tendency to pucker considerably, thus drawing the man's eyelid down on his cheek and giving to that visual organ something of the appearance of a bulldog's.

Both men observed Webster's swift but intense appraisal of them, and he of the puckered eye—perhaps because he was the cynosure of that scrutiny and morbidly sensitive of his facial disfigurement—replied with a cool, sullen stare that was almost belligerent.

Webster gazed after them whimsically as he approached the counter.

"I'd hate to wake up some night and find that *hombre* with the puckered eye leaning over me. To what branch of the genus Greaser do those two horse-thieves belong?" he queried.

"Central America, I take it," the clerk answered. "They appear interested in the names of passengers bound for Caribbean ports. Looking for a friend, I suppose."

"Hardly. I speak their kind of Spanish and a peon doesn't refer to his friends in the free-and-easy language these fellows employed. By the way," he continued, suddenly apprehensive, "do you get much of that paraqueet travel on your line?"

"About 80 per cent. of it is off colour, sir."

Webster pondered the 80-per-cent. probability of being berthed in the same stateroom with one of these people and the prospect was as revolting to him as would be an uninvited negro guest at the dining table of a southern family. He had all a Westerner's hatred for the breed.

"Well, I want a ticket to San Buenaventura," he informed the clerk, "but I don't relish the idea of a Greaser in the same stateroom with me. I wonder if you couldn't manage to fix me up with a stateroom all to myself, or at least arrange it so that in the event of company I'll draw a white man. I can stand a slovenly white man where a clean peon would be unbearable, although—peon or caballero—these people are apt to be tarred with the same stick. I don't care for any of them in mine."

"I'm sorry, sir, but I cannot guarantee you absolute privacy nor any kind of white man. It's pretty mixed travel to all Central American ports."

"How many berths in your first-class staterooms?"

"Two."

Webster smiled brightly. He had found a way out of the difficulty. "I'll buy 'em both, son," he announced.

"I cannot sell you an entire stateroom, sir. It's

against the orders of the company to sell two berths to one man. The travel is pretty brisk and it's hardly fair to the public, you know."

"Well, suppose I buy one ticket for myself and the other for—well, for my valet, let us say. Of course," he added brightly, "I haven't engaged the valet yet and even should I do so I wouldn't be at all surprised if the rascal missed the boat!"

The clerk glanced at him with a slow smile, and pondered. "Well," he said presently. "it's a poor rule that hasn't its exception, and when it comes to killing cats, strangulation with a butter-ball isn't the only method. If you care to buy a ticket for your valet, I'm sure I shouldn't worry whether or not he catches the boat. If my records show that the space is sold of two men and the purser collects two tickets, I think you'll be pretty safe from intrusion."

"To the harassed traveller," said Mr. Webster, "a meeting with a gentleman of your penetration is as refreshing as a canteen of cool water in the desert. Shoot!" and he produced a handful of gold.

"I will—provided I have one empty cabin," and the clerk turned from the counter to consult his record of berths already sold and others reserved but not paid for. Presently he faced Webster at the counter.

"The outlook is very blue," he announced. "Every name on the passenger list has a preponderance of vowels in it. However, I have one berth in No. 34 reserved by a gentleman who was to call for it by two o'clock to-day." He looked at his watch. "It

is now a quarter of one. If the reservation isn't claimed promptly at two o'clock I shall cancel it and reserve for you both berths in that room. If you will be good enough to leave me your name and address I will telephone you after that hour. In the meantime, you may make reservation of the other berth in the same stateroom. I feel very confident that the reservation in No. 34 will not be called for, Mr.—er——"

"Webster—John S. Webster. You are very kind, indeed. I'm at the St. Charles."

"Be there at a quarter after two, Mr. Webster, and you will hear from me promptly on the minute," the clerk assured him; whereupon Webster paid for one berth and departed for his hotel with a feeling that the clerk's report would be favourable.

True to his promise, at precisely a quarter after two, the ticket clerk telephoned Webster at his hotel that the berth in No. 34 had been cancelled and the entire stateroom was now at his disposal.

"If you will be good enough to give me the name of your valet," he concluded, "it will not be necessary for you to come down for your tickets, Mr. Webster. I will fill in both names on my passenger manifest and send the tickets to your hotel by messenger immediately. You can then sign the tickets—I have already signed them as witness—and pay the messenger."

"Well, I haven't engaged that valet as yet," Webster began, but the other interrupted cheerfully:

"What's the odds? He's going to miss the boat, anyhow. All I require is a name."

"That ought to be a simple request to comply with. Let me see! If I had a valet I think I should want him to be called Andrew or Martin."

"I read a book once, Mr. Webster, and the valet in that book was called Andrew Bowers."

"Bowers is a fine old English name. Let us seek no further. Andrew Bowers it is."

"Thank you. All you have to do then is to remember to sign the name, Andrew Bowers, to one ticket. Don't forget your valet's name now, and ball everything up," and the clerk hung up, laughing.

Half an hour later a boy from the steamship office arrived with the tickets, collected for them, and departed, leaving John Stuart Webster singularly pleased with himself and at peace with the entire world.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

A "LARGE" dinner at Antoine's that night (Webster had heard of Antoine's dinners, both large and small and was resolved not to leave New Orleans until he had visited the famous restaurant), and a stroll through the picturesque old French quarter and along the levee next day, helped to render his enforced stay in New Orleans delightful, interesting, and instructive. Webster was one of those distinctful individual types to whom a chamber of horrors would be productive of more enjoyment than the usual round of "points of interest." Experience had demonstrated to him that such points usually are uninteresting and wearing on the imagination, for the reason that the tourist trappers and proprietors of automobile 'buses, who map out the tours have no imagination themselves. Consequently, Webster preferred to prowl around quietly on little tours of discovery, personally conducted by himself. The search for obscure restaurants of unquestioned merit was with him almost a mania, and since in quaint New Orleans the food and drink specialist finds his highest heaven, no cloud marked the serenity of his delightful peregrinations.

The next day would be Sunday, and Webster planned an early morning visit to the old French

market, around which still lingers much of the picturesque charm and colourful romance of a day that is done—that echo of yesterday, as it were, which has left upon New Orleans an individuality as distinct as that which the olden, golden, godless days have left upon San Francisco.

He rose before six o'clock, therefore; found a taxi, with the driver sound asleep inside, at the curb in front of the hotel; gave the latter his instructions, and climbed in.

It being Sunday morning New Orleans slept late. Save for the few early morning worshippers hurrying to mass—mostly servants in a hurry to return to their kitchens and cook breakfast—the streets were deserted. The languorous air of dawn was redolent of the perfume of orange, rose, and sweet olive; from the four corners of the old town the mellow chimes of the Catholic church bells pealed their sweet, insistent call to the faithful; an atmosphere of subtle peace and sanctity pervaded the silent streets and awoke in John Stuart Webster's heart a vague nostalgia.

Perhaps it was because so much of his life had been spent in lonely mountain or desert camps, or perhaps it was because this taxi ride through the pleasant southern dawn was so typical of the swift passing of the youth which had gone from him before he had had an opportunity to taste, even moderately, of its joys and allurements. He sighed—a little regretful sigh.

"That's you, Johnny Webster," he told himself, "breezing along through life like a tin-canned dog;

passing the sweet and the beautiful and battling with the harsh and unlovely; here to-day and gone to-morrow, a poor harried devil with your trunk on your back, a slave to the call of gold; restless, in a great hurry to get there and an equal hurry to leave for the new diggings, and all the time Life passes you by and you don't grab so much as a tail feather! On such a morn as this Eve entered the Garden of Eden, while I, consummate idiot, shut myself up in a taxi to watch a bill of expense run up on the clock, while sniffing myrrh and incense through this confounded window. I'll get out and walk!"

He was opposite Jackson Square and the cloying sweetness of palmetto, palm, and fig burdened the air. Above the rumble of the taxi he could hear the distant babel of voices in the French market across the square, so he halted the taxicab, alighted, and handed the driver a bill.

"I want to explore this square," he said. He had recognized it by the heroic statue of General Jackson peeping through the trees. "I'll walk through the square to the market, and you may proceed to the market and meet me there. Later we will return to the hotel."

The chauffeur nodded, and Webster, every fibre of his alert, healthy body once more tingling with the sheer joy of living, entered the square, found a path that wound its way through the shrubbery, and came out at length in the main pathway, close to the Jackson memorial statue.

A Creole girl—starry-eyed, beautiful, rich with the

glorious colouring of her race—passed him bound for the cathedral across the square, as Webster thought, for she carried a large prayer book on her arm. To Webster she seemed to fit perfectly into her surroundings, to lend to them the last, final touch of beauty, the apotheosis of peace, and again the nostalgic fever submerged the quiet joy with which he had approached his journey through the square. His glance followed the girl down the walk.

Presently she halted. A young man rose from a bench where evidently he had been waiting for her, and bowed low, his hat clasped to his breast, as only a Frenchman or a Spanish grandee can bow. Webster saw the Creole girl turn to him with a little gesture of pleasure. She extended her hand and the young man kissed it with old-fashioned courtesy.

John Stuart Webster knew now what was missing in his scheme of things, as with reverent and wistful eyes he watched their meeting.

"Forty years old," he thought, "and I haven't spoken to a dozen women that caused me a second thought, or who weren't postmistresses or biscuit shooters! Forty years old and I've never been in love! Spring time down that little path and Indian summer in my old fool heart. Why, I ought to be arrested for failure to live!"

The lovers were walking slowly, arm in arm, back along the path by which the girl had come, so with a courtesy and gentleness that were innate in him, Webster stepped out of sight behind the statue of Old Hickory; for he did not desire, by his mere

presence, to intrude a discordant note in the perfect harmony of those two human hearts. He knew they desired that sylvan path to themselves; that evidently they had sought their early morning tryst in the knowledge that the square was likely to be deserted at this hour. Therefore, to provoke self-consciousness in them now savoured to John Stuart Webster of a high crime and misdemeanour, for which reason he was careful to keep General Jackson between himself and the lovers until they had gone by.

The young man was speaking as they passed; his voice was rich, pleasant, vibrant with the earnestness of what he had to say: with a pretty little silver-mounted walking stick he slashed at spears of grass alongside the path; the girl was crying a little. Neither of them had seen him, so he entered a path that led from them at right angles.

He had proceeded but a few feet along this trail when, through a break in the shrubbery ahead of him, he saw two men. They were crossing Webster's path and following a course paralleling that of the lovers in the broad main walk. Brief as was his glimpse of them, however, Webster instantly recognized the two Central Americans he had seen in the steamship ticket office two days previous.

They were not walking as walk two men abroad at this hour for a constitutional. Neither did they walk as walk men churchward bound. A slight, skulking air marked their progress, and caused Webster to wonder idly what they were stalking.

He turned into the path down which the two men

had passed, not with the slightest idea of shadowing them, but because his destination lay in that direction. The Central Americans were approximately fifty yards in advance of him as he turned in their wake, and at sight of them his suspicion that they were stalking something was quickened into belief.

Both men had forsaken the gravelled path and were walking on the soft velvet of blue grass lawn that fringed it!

"Perhaps I'd better deaden my hoof beats also," John Stuart Webster soliloquized, and followed suit immediately.

He had scarcely done so when the men ahead of him paused abruptly. Webster did likewise, and responding—subconsciously, perhaps, to the remembrance of the menace in the glance of the man with the puckered eye—he stepped out of sight behind a broad oak tree. Through the trees and shrubbery he could still see the lovers, who had halted and evidently were about to part.

Webster saw the young man glance warily about; then, apparently satisfied there was none to spy upon them, he drew the girl gently toward him. She clung to him for nearly a minute, sobbing; then he raised her face tenderly, kissed her, pressed her from him, and walked swiftly away without looking back.

It was a sweet and rather touching little tableau; to John Stuart Webster, imaginative and possessed of a romantic streak in his nature, it was more than a tableau. It was a moving picture!

"I suppose her old man objects to the young fel-

low," he muttered to himself sympathetically, "and he can't come near the house. They've met here for the fond farewell, and now the young fellow's going out West to make his fortune, so he can come back and claim the girl. Huh! If he wants her, why the devil doesn't he take her? I'd tell her old man I'd picked on him for my father-in-law, and then if he didn't like me I'd let the old fellow rave; and see how much good it would do him. But the French are different; they always let the old folks step in and rock the boat—— Hello! By Judas priest! Now I know what those two paraqueets are up to. One of them is the father of that girl. They've been spying on the lovers, and now they're going to corner the young fellow and shingle him for his nerve."

The girl had stood for a moment, gazing after her companion, before she turned with her handkerchief to her eyes, and continued on her way to the cathedral. Webster had observed that the two men ahead of him paid no attention to her, but pressed eagerly forward after the man.

Webster could look across about thirty yards of low shrubbery at the girl as she passed. He heard her sobbing as she stumbled blindly by, and he was distressed about her, for all the world loves a lover and John Stuart Webster was no exception to this universal rule.

"By George, this is pretty tough," he reflected. "That young fellow treated that girl with as much gentleness and courtesy as any gentleman should, and I'm for him and against this idea of corporal

punishment. Don't you worry, Tillie, my dear. I'm going to horn into this game myself if it goes too far."

The two dusky skulkers ahead of him, having come to another crosspath, turned into it and came out on the main path in the rear of the young man. Webster noticed that they were walking twice as fast as when he had first observed them, and more than ever convinced that presently there might be work for a strong man and true, he hastened after them.

As he came out into the main walk again, he noticed that the pair were still walking on the grass. He padded gently along behind them.

The four were now rapidly approaching the old French market, and the steadily rising babel of voices speaking in French, Italian, Spanish, Creole patois and Choctaw, was sufficient to have drowned the slight noise of the pursuit, even had the young man's mind not been upon other things, and the interest of the two Central Americans centred upon their quarry, to the exclusion of any thought of possible interruption.

Webster felt instinctively that the two men would rush and make a concerted attack from the rear. He smiled.

"I'll just fool you two *hombres* a whole lot," he thought, and stooping, picked up a small stone. On the instant the two men, having approached within thirty feet of their quarry, made a rush for him.

Their charge was swift, but swift though it was, the little stone which John Stuart Webster hurled was

swifter. It struck the young man fairly between the shoulderblades with a force sufficient to bring him out of his sentimental reverie with a jerk, as it were. He whirled, saw the danger that threatened him, and —sprang to meet it.

"Bravo!" yelled Webster, and ran to his aid, for he had seen now that it was to be knife work. Tragedy instead of melodrama.

The man with the puckered eye closed in with such eagerness it was apparent to Webster that here was work to his liking. The young man raised his light cane, but Pucker-eye did not hesitate. He merely threw up his left forearm to meet the expected blow aimed at his head, lunged forward and slashed viciously at the young man's abdomen. The latter drew back a step, doubled like a jack-knife, and brought his cane down viciously across the knuckles of his assailant's right hand.

"So it is thou, son of a pig," he called pleasantly in Spanish. "I fooled you that time, didn't I?" he added in English. "Thought I would aim for your head, didn't you?"

The blow temporarily paralyzed the assassin's hand; he dropped the knife, and as he stooped to recover it with his left hand, the young man, before retreating from Pop-eye, kicked Pucker-eye in the face and quite upset him.

"Stop it!" shouted Webster.

Pop-eye turned his head at the outcry. The man he was attacking fell into the position of a swordsman *en garde*, and thrust viciously with the ferule

at the face of the pop-eyed man, who, disregarding Webster's approach, seized the cane in his left hand and with a quick, powerful tug actually drew his victim toward him a foot before the latter let go the stick.

Before he could give ground again Pop-eye was upon him. He grasped the young man by the latter's left arm and held him, while he drew back for the awful disembowelling stroke; as his long arm sped forward the hook of John Stuart Webster's heavy cane descended upon that flexed arm in the brook of the elbow, snagging it cleverly.

The knife never reached its destination!

"You would, would you?" said Webster reproachfully, and jerked the fellow violently around. The man he had rescued promptly struck Pop-eye a terrible blow in the face with his left hand and broke loose from the grip that had so nearly been his undoing; whereupon Webster tapped the assassin a meditative tap or two on the top of his sinful head for good measure and to awaken in him some sense of the impropriety and futility of resistance, after which Webster turned to discuss a similar question of ethics with Pucker-eye.

The scar-cheeked man was on his knees, groping groggily for his knife, for he had received a severe kick under the chin, and for the nonce was far from dangerous. Stooping, Webster picked up the knife; then with knife and cane grasped in his left hand he seized Pucker-eye by the nape with his right and jerked him to his feet. The assassin stood glow-

ering at him in a perfect frenzy of brutish, inarticulate fury.

"Take the knife away from the other fellow before he gets active again," Webster called over his shoulder. "I'll manage this rascal. We'll march them over to the market and turn them over to the police." He spoke in Spanish.

"Thanks, ever so much, for my life," the young man answered lightly, and in English, "but where I come from it is not the fashion to settle these arguments in a court of law. To call an officer is considered unclublike; to shoot a prisoner in this country is considered murder, and consequently I have but one alternative and I advise you, my good friend, to have a little of the same. I'm going to run like the devil."

And he did. He was in full flight before Webster could glance around, and in an instant he was lost to sight among the trees.

"That advice sounds eminently fair and reasonable," Webster yelled after him, and was about to follow when he observed that the young man had abandoned his pretty little silver-chased walking stick.

"That's too nice a little stick to leave to these brigands," he thought, and forthwith possessed himself of it and the pop-eyed man's knife, after which he tarried not upon the order of his going but went, departing at top speed.

The young man he had saved from being butchered was right. An entangling alliance with the police

was, decidedly, not to John Stuart Webster's liking, for should he, unfortunately, form such an alliance, he would be haled into court as a witness and perhaps miss the steamer to San Buenaventura.

"Drat it," he soliloquized, as he emerged from the square and observed his taxi parked at the entrance to the market, "I came through that square so fast I haven't the slightest idea what the last half of it looks like. That's what I get for mixing in a little Donnybrook that's none of my business."

He had planned to spend an hour in the market, drink a cup of *café noir*, smoke a cigarette, and return to his hotel in time for a leisurely breakfast, but his recent bout with grim reality had blunted the edge of romance. He ordered his driver to take him back to the hotel, sprang inside and congratulated himself on his lucky escape.

CHAPTER TWELVE

WEBSTER'S trunk went aboard the steamer early the following morning, and at noon he entered a taxi with his hand baggage and was driven to the levee where *La Estrellita* lay tugging gently at her mooring lines. Owing to the congestion of freight and traffic the chauffeur stopped his cab a little distance from the gangplank, where Webster discharged him with a liberal tip.

The latter, however, swung his passenger's bag and suitcase to the ground, picked them up and started for the gangplank.

"Never mind my baggage, lad," Webster called after him. "One of the deck boys will care for it."

The chauffeur turned. "You've been very generous with me, sir," he answered, "so I think I had better carry your baggage aboard. If you permit a deck boy to handle it, you merely have to give another tip, and that would be sheer wanton waste. Why shouldn't I earn the one you gave me?"

"I hadn't figured it out that way, son, so here's another half dollar for being the only existing specimen of your species in captivity. My stateroom is No. 34, upper deck, port side," Webster answered, smiling. The man took the tip eagerly and hurried toward the gangplank; the quartermaster

on duty shouldered a way for him and he darted aboard.

Webster followed leisurely. At the gangplank the purser's clerk halted him, examined his tickets and punched them.

"Where is the other man?' he asked. "You have two tickets here."

"Oh, that blamed valet of mine," Webster answered, and glanced around as if in search of that mythical functionary. "It would be like the stupid fellow to miss the boat," he added. "When he comes——"

Webster ceased speaking abruptly. He was looking straight into the malevolent orbs of Pucker-eye, who was standing just behind the clerk at the foot of the gangplank.

"I wonder if Pop-eye's around, also," Webster thought, and he faced about. Pop-eye was standing in back of him, leaning over the railing of the gangway.

"Which is the valet?" the purser's clerk asked, scanning the names on the tickets.

"Andrew Bowers."

"All right, Mr. Webster," the other answered, with that genial camaraderie that seems inseparable from all of his calling. "When Andrew comes I'll send him aboard."

He started to pass the tickets back to Webster, but a detaining hand rested on his arm, while a dark thumb and forefinger lifted the trailing strips of tickets. Pucker-eye was examining them also.

The purser's clerk drove his elbow backward vio-

lently into Pucker-eye's midriff and shook him off roughly.

"What do you mean, you black-and-tan hound?" he demanded. "Since when did you begin to O. K. my work?"

Pucker-eye made no reply to this stern reproof. He accepted the elbow with equanimity, and faced Webster with an evil smile that indicated mutual recognition.

"Bueno," he said, with such genuine satisfaction that Webster could not help demanding:

"*Por que es bueno?* (Why is it good?)"

"We meet the señor first in the teeket office. We meet the señor again yesterday morning, no? After, we remember we have meet the señor in the teeket office! *Quien sabe?* The señor he ees sail on *La Estrellita* for San Buenaventura, no?"

"So you came nosing around to see about it, eh? Doing a little plain gumshoe work, I see."

Pucker-eye bowed. By the simple exercise of courage and bad manners he had looked at John Stuart Webster's ticket and was now familiar with his name and destination.

The object of this solicitude had little difficulty in guessing the reason behind it all, and he was not happy. He would have preferred that the incident of their former meeting should not be held against him; he wished most devoutedly that his part in the ruction in Jackson Square on Sunday morning might have been forgotten by all concerned, and this revival of the unpleasant episode was slightly disconcerting.

As a usual thing he was loth to interject himself in the affairs of other people, and had a deep-seated animosity against those who did; he would have preferred to round out his existence without having to take into consideration the presence of a twin Nemesis. However, since the fat was in the fire, so to speak, Webster felt that there was nothing for him to do save brazen things out as best he could, so he glowered darkly at Pucker-eye and said:

"Well, you scoundrelly cutthroat, what are you going to do about it? Try a little of your knife work on me, I suppose?"

Pucker-eye did not answer, but his beady glance wavered and shifted before the cool, contemptuous menace of Webster's blue eyes.

"Listen, *hombre*," Webster continued. "I know your kind of people like a nigger knows cologne. I know what you'd like to do to me in exchange for what I did to you yesterday morning, but you take a tip from me and don't try it, or one of these days they'll be walking slow behind you and your *compañero*, and you won't know it!"

The fellow grinned—the kind of grin that is composed of equal parts of ferocity and knowledge of superior strength. That grin did more to disconcert Webster than the knowledge that he had earned for himself two bloodthirsty and implacable enemies, for Pucker-eye was the first of his breed that Webster had ever seen smile under insult. That cool smile infuriated him.

Pucker-eye took out a cigarette case, selected a

cigarette, and presented the case to Webster. His bad manners in selecting his own cigarette first was deliberate, as Webster knew. It was the Latin-American's method of showing his contempt.

"We shall meet again, Meester Webstaire," he said. "May I offer the señor a cigarette for the—what you Americans call—the keepsake? No?" He smiled brightly and closed his puckered eye in a knowing wink.

Webster took his tickets from the purser, folded them, placed them in his pocket and for a few seconds regarded Pucker-eye contemptuously.

"When we meet again, you scum," he retorted quietly, " you shall have no difficulty in remembering me. You may keep your cigarette."

His long, powerful right arm shot out; like a forceps his thumb and forefinger closed over Pucker-eye's rather flat nose; he squeezed, and with a shrill scream of agony Pucker-eye went to his knees.

Still holding the wretch by his proboscis, Webster turned quickly in order that his face might be toward Pop-eye.

"Pop-eye," he said, "if you take a hand in this, I'll twist your nose, too, and afterward I'll throw you in the river."

He turned to Pucker-eye.

"Up, thou curious little one," he said in Spanish, and jerked the unhappy rascal to his feet. The latter clawed ineffectually at the terrible arm which held him, until, presently discovering that the harder he struggled the harder Webster pinched his nose,

he ceased his struggles and hung limply, moaning with pain and rage in the grip of the American.

"Good!" Webster announced, slacking his grip a little. With his left hand he deftly extracted a hair from each flank of the screaming little scoundrel's scant moustache, and held them before the latter's tear-filled eyes.

"My friend," he said gently, "mark how the gringo gives his little dark brother a lesson in deportment. Behold, if I have given thee a souvenir of our meeting, I also have taken one. By this pinched and throbbing nose shall I be remembered when I am gone; by these hairs from thy rat's moustache shall I remember thee. Go, and thrust not that nose into a gringo's business again. It is unsafe."

He released Pucker-eye, nodded brightly to the purser's clerk and quartermaster, who, spellbound and approving, had watched him mete out retribution according to his code, and went aboard, just as an assistant steward came hurrying along the deck beating a lusty solo on a triangle—the signal for all non-passengers to go ashore.

Webster made his way through the crowd to his room, looked in, saw that his baggage was there, and walked around on the starboard side to join in the general farewell of all on board to the crowd on the levee.

At the shore end of the gangplank Pucker-eye and Pop-eye still waited. The unfortunate Pucker-eye was weeping with pain and futile rage and humiliation, but Webster noticed that Pop-eye's attention was not on his friend but upon each passenger that

boarded the ship, of which there were the usual number of late arrivals. As each passenger approached, Pop-eye scanned him with more than casual interest.

Webster smiled. "Looking for that valet they heard me talking about," he reflected. "Pop-eye, you're a fine, capable lad. I thought you had the brains of the two. You're not going away until you've had a chance to size up the reinforcements at my command, are you?"

Promptly at one o'clock the captain mounted the bridge and ordered the gangplank drawn ashore. The breastline was cast off; with a long-drawn bellow from her siren the wheel of *La Estrellita* commenced to churn the muddy water and her bow swung gently outboard, while the stern line acted as a spring. With the stern line slackened and cast overboard the vessel pushed slowly out into the stream where the current caught her and swung her in a wide arc. Webster watched Pucker-eye and Pop-eye leave the landing arm in arm. Pop-eye was sporty enough to wave at him, and Webster, not to be outdone in kind, waved back.

He lighted a cigar and leaned over the rail as the steamer, gathering speed, swept down river.

"Good-bye, you golden fizz and chicken gumbo," he called, as the city receded and the low, wooded shores below the city came into view. He had forgotten Pucker-eye and Pop-eye in the flood of poignant regret that swept over h m at the memory of the peerless Antoine!

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

WHEN he had finished his cigar he cast the stump overboard, watched it until it disappeared astern, and then went around to state-room No. 34. As he stepped in, and closed the door a masculine voice said very pleasantly:

"How do you do?"

Mr. Webster looked up and beheld a young man, arrayed in a very fancy pair of light blue silk pyjamas, stretched at his ease in the upper berth. In his right hand he held an open book; his left hand grasped his bare right foot, which he was rubbing comfortably; in his mouth he held an aromatic Turkish cigarette. He was very much at home, no doubt of that, for he was smiling in the friendliest fashion imaginable.

John Stuart Webster stared at the stranger for several seconds and concluded he was invading the sanctity of another's stateroom. "Excuse me," he said, "I guess I'm in the right church but the wrong pew," and he stepped out and looked for the number on the stateroom. To his surprise it *was* No. 34 after all, so he stepped back into the stateroom and favoured the stranger with another scrutiny.

"It does appear to me, my friend," he said presently, "that I detect something strangely familiar about your pyjamas."

"I wouldn't be the least bit surprised, Mr. Webster. I found them in your suitcase."

"Well, how do you do?" Webster declared.

"Pretty well, all things considered. May I offer you one of your own cigarettes? I found them in the suitcase also, and can recommend them highly."

"Thank you very much." Webster helped himself to a cigarette and sat down on the settee. Fell a silence of perhaps half a minute. Then:

"I dislike to appear inquisitive," Webster began, "but the fact is, neighbour, I'm curious to know where you got that book. I observe you are reading Samuel Butler's 'Way of all Flesh,' and that the book is slightly damaged. Recently I purchased such a book in——"

"Pray do not take the trouble to explain," the other answered airily. "I discovered this excellent book in your suitcase also. In fact, for me, that suitcase has proved to be a repository of treasures."

John Stuart Webster's neck came out of his collar with the suddenness of a turtle snapping at a fly; he drew himself up beside the top berth until his face was on a level with his unbidden guest's, upon whom he bent a look of mingled emotions. On his part the stranger returned his gaze with grave interest, and when the silence threatened to become embarrassing he said:

"Will you have the goodness to press that button? I think we should drink a bumper to our better acquaintance and I have no doubt but that the barkeeper on this packet can manufacture a golden fizz.

Do you care for the famous New Orleans golden fizz?"

"It is a wonderful institution," Webster replied, "and I'll have one. I need it to sustain me, for I am faint with amazement." He pressed the button. "While the golden fizz is fizzing," he continued, "suppose you let me have a look at your ticket."

"Ticket?" echoed his visitor. "I haven't any ticket. A kind gentleman bought one for me and has it in his possession. Do you, sir, by any chance, happen to be that philanthropic individual?"

"Well, I'll be——"

"Hush!" the stranger warned, raising an admonitory finger. "No profanity, please. I have been tenderly reared and cuss words will only shock me and clog the atmosphere. I'm here to do you and do you a delicate brown, so bear up, kind sir, and take your walloping like a sport."

"Who the devil are you?" John Stuart Webster demanded.

"I regret I have no card, but even if I had it would be no kindness to inflict upon an American gentleman the cognomen my parents honoured me with, for it is long and many-jointed, like a peanut, and embodies the names of all the saints in the calendar. Moreover, just at present I am travelling under an alias. I am known as Mr. Andrew Bowers."

"And your occupation?" Webster managed to articulate.

"Valet de chambre to that prince of gentlemen,

Mr. John S. Webster," the other replied with a mischievous gleam in his dark eyes.

Mr. Webster sat down limply on the settee. He was undecided whether to roar with laughter or shriek with rage; while he struggled for a decision Andrew Bowers blew smoke rings at the ceiling.

"Haven't I seen you before?" Webster queried presently.

"I wouldn't be surprised. I drove you down to the steamer in a taxi half an hour ago. You will recall that the taxi driver carried your luggage aboard."

Webster gazed around the stateroom. "Where have you hidden your livery?" he demanded.

"I wrapped it in a newspaper; then, seeking a moment when the deck outside was deserted, I stepped forth in my—I beg your pardon, your—pyjamas and tossed it overboard."

"But apparently you did not bring aboard with you a suit of clothes to take the place of your livery?"

"Quite true—lamentably so, Mr. Webster. Perhaps you will accept my desperate need as an excuse for borrowing your pyjamas. I notice you have another suit of them. Fortunate man!"

When confronted by something mysterious it was not John Stuart's habit to ask innumerable questions, and for the space of two minutes he gave himself up to deduction and a close scrutiny of his companion.

Andrew Bowers was a man of perhaps thirty years, five feet ten inches tall, and apparently in excellent health. He might have weighed a hundred and

seventy pounds and he was undeniably handsome. His head was nobly formed and covered with thick, wavy hair, shiny and black as ebony; his eyes were dark blue; the eyebrows, thick but fine and silky, almost met over the bridge of a thin, high nose that was just a trifle too long for his face. Webster decided it was the nose of a thinker. Andrew Bowers's forehead was broad and high and his head was thick forward of the ears, infallible sign of brains; his mouth and chin were full of determination, although capable of a smile of singular sweetness; while the skin on his legs was milk-white, his hands and face were tanned to the colour of a manzanita stick, seeming to indicate that he had lived an outdoor life.

While Webster was wondering whether his companion was merely a high-class tramp or an absconding bank cashier, a knock sounded on the stateroom door. He opened it and the purser stood in the entrance.

"Tickets, please?" he announced.

Webster surrendered both tickets, receiving in turn two seat checks for the dining saloon, and the purser passed on to the next cabin.

Andrew Bowers smiled a small, prescient smile, but said nothing and presently John Stuart Webster broke the silence. "Well," he ordered "sing the song or tell the story."

"I noticed you surrendered my ticket to the purser," the young man answered irrelevantly, "and I am glad of that. I take it as *prima facie* evidence

that you have made up your mind to accept my company."

"You're too infernally cool and cocksure, my friend," Webster warned him testily. "I pride myself on a sense of humour and I dearly love a joke until it's carried too far, but be advised in time, young man, and don't try to play horse with me. I haven't made up my mind to accept your company, although, provided you do not rub my fur the wrong way, I may decide to put up with you, for whether you are a decayed gentleman or an engaging scoundrel, you are, at least, intelligent and impressive, clean, white, resourceful, and pleasant. However, my acceptance or non-acceptance of you is a subject for future discussion, since at present we have some fiduciary matters before us. You owe me fifty dollars for your ticket, Andrew Bowers, and in view of the fact that I never saw you before to-day, suppose we start the voyage by squaring the account."

Andrew Bowers sat up in the berth and let his legs drape over the side. "Mr. Webster," he began seriously, "had I sung my song or told my story before you surrendered that ticket to the purser I might have found myself in a most embarrassing predicament. If, prior to the arrival of the purser to collect the tickets, you had handed my ticket to me, saying: 'Here is your ticket, Mr. Bowers. Be kind enough to reimburse me to the extent of fifty dollars,' I should have been compelled to admit then, as I do now, that I haven't fifty dollars. Fortunately for me, however, you surrendered the ticket to the

purser before acquainting yourself with the state of my fortunes; the voyage has commenced and whether you like it or not, my dear sir, I am your guest from now until we reach San Buenaventura. Rather an interesting situation, don't you think?"

John Stuart Webster was of Scotch ancestry. He had an hereditary regard for his baubees. He was a business man. Prodigal spender though he was and generous to a fault, the fact remained that he always made it a point to get value received, and he was prodigal with his own money; he preferred that the privilege of prodigality with the Websterian funds should remain an inalienable prerogative of the sole surviving member of the Webster family. He gazed contemplatively now upon his devil-may-care, unbidden guest, torn between a desire to whisk him out of the berth and shake him until his teeth fell out, and another to be just and patient, in the hope that some great extenuating circumstance might be adduced to account for this impudent daylight robbery. Mr. Webster had been deluded, cheated, robbed, and pillaged many a time and oft in the course of his rather eventful career, but he had yet to meet the man who, having swindled him out of fifty dollars, had the effrontery to add insult to injury by exhibiting a perfectly obvious intention of making him like it. Indeed, John Stuart Webster was obsessed with a secret fear that the smiling bandit in the upper berth was going to succeed in his nefarious design, and, in the contemplation of this unheard-of *contretemps*, the genial John was struck temporarily speechless.

"The last cent I had in the world went to that taxi person whose taxi I borrowed and whose old uniform I purchased," Andrew Bowers supplemented his confession.

"You asked me to ring for two golden fizzes," Webster reproached him. "Am I to be stuck for the drinks? Not satisfied with rooking me for a first-class passage to San Buenaventura you plan to tack on extras, eh?"

"Oh, I'll pay for the drinks," Andrew Bowers assured him.

"How can you, if you gave your last cent to that taxi driver?"

"You tipped me very liberally for carrying your baggage aboard," Andrew Bowers retorted slyly.

"Ouch!" cried Mr. Webster, and laughed. The very next instant he was provoked at himself for having done so. That laugh gave the brigand Andrew a decided advantage, for it placed Webster on defensive ground. He was convinced of this when the brigand said:

"Thanks for that laugh, Mr. Webster. It arouses hope in my sad heart. I have outraged your patience, your privacy, and your pocketbook—yet you laughed. *Bueno.* I will be equally good-natured and forgive you for questioning my sincerity in the matter of dispensing my hospitality; even the little slur cast on my veracity in the matter of my finances shall pass unnoticed."

"I think you're too cool, young man," Webster retorted. "Just a tr fle too cocksure. Up to the

present moment you have proffered no evidence why you should not be adjudged a cad, and I do not like cads and must decline to permit one to occupy the same stateroom at my expense. You are clever and amusing and I laughed at you, but at the same time my sense of humour is not so great as to cause me to overlook your impudence and laugh with you. Now, if you have anything to say, say it quickly, because you're going to go away from here—in a hurry."

"I plead guilty to the indictment, Mr. Webster, and submit as an excuse the fact that desperate circumstances require desperate measures. I am not begging my way, neither am I beating it, for the reason that both forms of travel are repugnant to me. I am merely taking advantage of certain fortuitous circumstances to force you, an entire stranger, to extend to me a crèdit of fifty dollars until we reach San Buenaventura when you will be promptly reimbursed. I had thought," he added sadly, "that my face might prove ample security for a fifty-dollar loan. There has never been a crook in my family and I have never been charged with a penal offence or been in jail."

"It is not my habit," Webster retorted stiffly, "to extend credit to strangers who demand it."

"I do not demand it, sir. I beg it of you, and because I cannot afford to be refused I took care to arrange matters so that you would not be likely to refuse my request. Really, I do not mean to be cocksure and impudent, but before you throw me out I'd like to let you in on a secret about yourself."

"Well?"

"You're not going to throw me out."

"Why not?"

"Because you can't."

"That's fighting talk. Now, just to prove to you the depth of error in which you flounder, young man, I am about to throw you out." And he grasped Andrew Bowers in the grip of a grizzly bear and whisked him out of the top berth.

"Wait one second," his helpless victim cried. "I have something to say before you go any further."

"Say it," Webster ordered. "Your tongue is the only part of you that I cannot control."

"When you throw me out on deck," Andrew Bowers queried, "do your pyjamas go with me? Does the hair go with the hide?"

"They cost me sixteen dollars in Salt Lake City, but—good lord, yes. I can't throw you out mother naked; damn it, I can't throw you out at all."

"Didn't I tell you so? Be a good fellow and turn me loose."

"Certainly—for the time being. You'll stay locked in this stateroom while I have a talk with the captain. He'll probably dig up a shirt, a pair of dungarees, and some old shoes for you and set you ashore before we get out of the river. If he doesn't do that he'll keep you aboard and you'll shovel coal for your passage."

"But I'm Andrew Bowers and the purser has collected my first-class ticket!"

"What of it? I shall declare—and with truth—

that you are not Andrew Bowers, that you are not my valet, and that I did not buy the ticket for you. I dare you to face the captain in my pyjamas and prove you aren't a stowaway."

"You would win on that point," the baffling guest admitted, "but it is a point you will not raise. Why? Because I have another trump up my kimono." He climbed back into the upper berth and from that vantage point gazed down benevolently upon John Stuart Webster. "I'm disappointed in you," he continued sadly. "I thought you'd show a little normal human curiosity about me—and you haven't. You do not ask questions or I could explain, while I cannot volunteer information without seeming to seek your pity, and that course would be repugnant to me. I have never shovelled coal, although I daresay I could manage to earn my passage as a stoker; indeed, I daresay I shall have to, if you insist on being belligerent, and if you insist I shall not oppose you. I am hoping, however, that you will not insist, but that you will, on the contrary, accept my word of honour that you shall be reimbursed two hours after you land in San Buenaventura."

"New music to your song, my friend, but the same old words," Webster retorted, and stepped to the stateroom door. "You're doomed to shovel coal or go ashore."

"Listen. If I go ashore, your responsibility for my life ceases, Mr. Webster, but if the chief engineer happens to be short one coal-passer and the captain sends me down to the stokehole, your responsibility

for my death begins, for I'll be put ashore publicly at San Buenaventura and two hours later I'll be facing a firing squad in the cemetery of the Catedrál de la Vera Cruz."

"Gosh," John Stuart Webster murmured dazedly, "I'm afraid I can't take a chance like that for fifty dollars."

A knock sounded on the door and Webster opened it. A waiter stood in the entrance. "Did you ring, sir?" he queried.

"I did," replied John Stuart Webster. "Bring up two glasses and a quart of the best wine aboard the ship."

The waiter hastened away and Webster turned to face the little, cryptic, humorous smile that made his travelling companion so singularly boyish and attractive.

"You win, son," Webster declared. "I'm whipped to a frazzle. Any time I'm sitting in back of a royal flush and the other fellow bluffs me out of the pot, I always buy the wine. When it arrives we shall drink to our better acquaintance. Pending its arrival, please be advised that you are welcome to my pyjamas, my cigarettes, my book, and my stateroom. You are my guest and you owe me nothing, except, perhaps, your confidence, although I do not insist upon that point. Where I come from every man kills his own snakes."

And he held up his hand for Andrew Bowers to shake.

"Mr. Webster," the latter declared feelingly, "I

am not a lord of language, so I cannot find words to thank you. I agree with you that you are entitled to my confidence. My name is——"

"Tut, tut, my boy. Your name is Andrew Bowers, and that identifies you sufficiently for the time being. Your face is a guaranty of your character and entitles you to a nominal credit."

"But——"

"Make me no buts. I care not who you are; perhaps what I do not know will not distress me. When I suggested that I was entitled to a measure of your confidence, I meant on a few minor points only —points on which my curiosity has been abnormally aroused."

"Very well, my friend. Fire away."

"Are you an American citizen?"

"No, I am a citizen of Sobrante."

"You have assured me that you are not a crook; consequently I know you are not fleeing from the United States authorities. You had no money to pay for your passage to San Buenaventura so you schemed to make me pay your way. Hence I take it that your presence in the capital of your native country is a matter of extreme importance and that the clerk in the ticket office of the Caribbean Mail Line is a friend of yours."

"Quite true. He knew my need."

"You were under surveillance and could not leave New Orleans for San Buenaventura unless you left secretly. When I purchased both berths in this stateroom and the ticket clerk knew I held a first-

class ticket for a valet that was not, he decided to saw off on me a valet that was. So he gave you my name and the name of my hotel, you arranged matters with the taxi starter and the taxi driver and drove me to the steamer. Disguised in the livery of a chauffeur and carrying hand baggage you hoped to get aboard without being detected by your enemies who watched the gangplank."

Andrew Bowers nodded.

"Do you think you succeeded?" Webster continued.

"I do not know, Mr. Webster. I hope so. If I did not—well, the instant this steamer drops anchor in the roadstead at San Buenaventura, she will be boarded and searched by the military police, I will be discovered and——" He shrugged.

"Lawn party in the cemetery, eh?" Webster suggested.

Andrew Bowers reached under his pillow and produced two heavy automatic pistols and a leathern box containing five clips of cartridges. These he exhibited in silence and then thrust them back under the pillow.

"I see, Andrew. In case you're cornered, eh? Well, I think I would prefer to die fighting myself. However, let us hope you will not have to face any such unpleasant alternative."

"I'm not worried, Mr. Webster. Somehow, I think I ran the gauntlet safely."

"But why did you throw your livery overboard?"

"It was of no further use to me. A chauffeur on

shipboard would be most incongruous, and the sight of the livery hanging on yonder peg would be certain to arouse the curiosity of the room steward. And I'm not going to appear on deck throughout the voyage. Might meet somebody who knows me."

"But you'll have to have some clothes in which to go ashore, you amazing man."

"Not at all. The steamer will arrive in the harbour of San Buenaventura late in the afternoon—too late to be given pratique that day. After dark I shall drop overboard and endeavour to swim ashore, and in view of that plan clothes would only prove an embarrassment. I shall land in my own country naked and penniless, but once ashore I shall quickly find shelter. I'll have to risk the sharks, of course."

"Man-eaters?"

"The bay is swarming with them."

"You're breaking my heart," Webster declared sympathetically. "I suppose you're going to feign illness throughout the voyage."

"Not the kind of illness that will interfere with my appetite. I have prescribed for myself a mild attack of inflammatory rheumatism, as an excuse for remaining in bed and having my meals brought to me. This service, of course, will necessitate some slight expense in the way of tips, but I am hoping you will see your way clear to taking care of that for your guest."

Silently Webster handed Andrew Bowers ten dollars in silver. "That ought to hold you," he declared. "For the rest, you're up to some political

skullduggery in Sobrante, and what it is and what's your real name are two subjects in which I am not interested. I am on a vacation and intend to amuse myself. If I find you as amusing as you appear at the outset of our acquaintance I shall do my best to break the tedium of your confinement in this stateroom and if I find you dull I shall leave you to your own devices. Let us talk anything but business and personalities and let it be understood that you are my valet, Andrew Bowers. That's all I know about you and that's all I care to know about you. In fact, the less I know about you the less will I have to explain in the event of your sudden demise."

"Fair enough," quoth Andrew Bowers. "You're a man after my own heart. I thank you."

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

PRIOR to leaving New Orleans, Webster had cabled Billy Geary that he was taking passage on *La Estrellita* and stating the approximate date of his arrival at San Buenaventura—which information descended upon that young man with something of the charm of a gentle rainfall over a hitherto arid district. He had been seeing Dolores Ruey at least once a day ever since her return to Sobrante; indeed, only the fear that he might wear out his welcome prevented him from seeing her twice a day. He was quick, therefore, to seize upon Webster's cablegram as an excuse to call upon Dolores and explain the mystery surrounding his friend's nonappearance.

"Well, Dolores," he began, in his excitement calling her by her first name for the first time, "they say it's a long lane that hasn't got a saloon at the end of it. I've heard from Jack Webster."

"What's the news, Bill?" Dolores inquired. From the first day of their acquaintance she had been growing increasingly fond of Geary; for nearly a week she had been desirous of calling him Bill, which is a comfortable name and, to Dolores's way of thinking, a peculiarly appropriate cognomen for such a distinctly American young man. At mention of the beloved word he glanced down at her pleasurably.

"Thank you," he said. "I'm glad you got around to it finally. Those that love me always call me Bill."

"You called me Dolores."

"I move we make it unanimous. I'm a foe to formality."

"Second the motion, Bill. So am I—when I care to be—and in our case your formality is spoiling our comradeship. And now, with reference to the extraordinary Señor Webster——"

"Why, the poor old horse has been down with ptomaine poisoning. They carried him off the train at St. Louis and stood him on his head and pumped him out and just did manage to cancel his order for a new tombstone. He says he's feeding regularly again and has booked passage on *La Estrellita*, so we can look for him on the next steamer arriving."

"Oh, the poor fellow!" Dolores murmured—so fervently that Billy was on the point of hurling his heart at her feet on the instant.

The thousand dollars Webster had cabled Billy "for a road-stake" had been dwindling rapidly under the stimulus of one continous opportunity to spend the same in a quarter where it was calculated to bring the most joy. The pleasures of the Sobrantean capital were not such that the average Yankee citizen might be inspired to prefer them with any degree of enthusiasm, but such as they were, Dolores Ruey had them all. In a country where the line between pure blood and mixed is drawn so strictly as it is in Sobrante, Billy Geary was, of course, a social impos-

sibility. He was a Caucasian who would shake hands and have a drink with a gentleman whose nails showed blue at the bases, for all his white skin—and in the limited upper-class circles of Buenaventura, where none but pure-bred descendants of pure-bred Castilians intermingled, the man or woman who failed, however slightly, to remember at all times that he was white, was distinctly *persona non grata*.

The first time Billy appeared in public riding in the same victoria with Mother Jenks and Dolores, therefore, he was fully aware that for the future Dolores Ruey was like himself, socially defunct in Sobrante. However, he did not care, for he had a sneaking suspicion Dolores was as indifferent as he; in fact, he took a savage delight in the knowledge that the girl would be proscribed, for with Dolores cut off from all other society she must, of necessity, turn to him throughout her visit. So, up to the night *La Estrellita*, with John Stuart Webster on board, dropped anchor on the quarantine-ground, Mr. Geary was the unflagging ballyhoo for a personally conducted tour of Dolores Ruey's native land within a radius of fifteen miles about Buenaventura. He was absolutely bogged in the quagmire of his first love affair, but until his mining concession should amply justify an avowal of his passion, an instinctive sense of the eternal fitness of things reminded Billy of the old proverb that a closed mouth catches no flies. And in the meantime (such is the optimism of youth) he decided there was no need for worry, for when a girl calls a fellow Bill, when she tells him he's

a scout and doesn't care a whoop for any society except his—*caramba!* it's great!

A wireless from Webster warned Billy of the former's imminent arrival. Just before sunset Billy and Dolores, riding along the Malecon, sighted a blur of smoke far out to sea—a blur that grew and grew until they could make out the graceful white hull of *La Estrellita*, before the swift tropic night descended and the lights of the great vessel shimmered across the harbour.

"Too late to clear quarantine to-night," Billy mourned, as he and Dolores rode back to her hotel. "All the same, I'm going to borrow the launch of my good friend Leber and his *protégé* Don Juan Cafetéro, and go out to the steamer to-night. I can heave to a little way from the steamer and welcome the old rascal, anyhow; he'll be expecting me to do that, and I wouldn't disappoint him for a farm."

Fortunately, good little Leber consented to Billy's request, and Don Juan Cafetéro was sober enough to turn the engine over and run the launch. From the deck of the steamer Webster, smoking his post-prandial cigar, caught sight of the launch's red and green sidelights chugging through the inky blackness; as the little craft slid up to within a cable's-length of the steamer and hove to, something told Webster that Billy Geary would soon be paging him. He edged over to the rail.

"That you, Bill?" he shouted.

"Hey! Jack, old pal!" Billy's delighted voice answered him.

"I knew you'd come, Billy boy."

"I knew you'd know it, Johnny. Can't come aboard, you know, until the ship clears, but I can lie off here and say hello. How is your internal mechanism?"

"Grand. I've got the world by the tail on a downhill haul once more, son. However, your query reminds me I haven't taken the medicine the doctor warned me to take after meals for a couple of weeks. Wait a minute, Bill, until I go to my stateroom and do my duty by my stomach."

For ten minutes Billy and Don Juan Cafetéro bobbed about in the launch; then a stentorian voice shouted from the steamer. "Hey, you! In the launch, there. Not so close. Back off."

Don Juan kicked the launch back fifty feet. "That will do!" the voice called again.

"Hello!" Billy soliloquized. "That's Jack Webster's voice. I've heard him bossing a gang of miners too often not to recognize that note of command. Wonder what he's up to. I thought he acted strangely—preferring medicine to me the minute I hailed him!"

While he was considering the matter, a voice behind him said very softly and indistinctly, like a man with a harelip:

"Mr. Geary, will you be good enough to back your launch a couple of hundred feet? When I'm certain I can't be seen from the steamer, I'll come aboard."

Billy turned, and in the dim light of his binnacle lamp observed a beautiful pair of white hands grasp-

ing the gunwale on the starboard quarter. He peered over and made out the head and shoulders of a man.

"All right," he replied in a low voice. "Hang where you are, and you'll be clear of the propeller."

He signalled Don Juan, who backed swiftly away, while Billy doused the binnacle lamp.

"That'll do," the thick voice said presently. "Bear a hand, friend, and I'll climb over."

He came, as naked as Mercury, sprawled on his belly in the cockpit, opened his mouth, spat out a compact little roll of tinfoil, opened it and drew out a ball of paper which he flattened out on the floor of the cockpit and handed up to Billy.

"Thank you," he said, very courteously and distinctly now. "My credentials, Mr. Geary, if you please."

Billy re-lighted the lamp and read:

DEAR BILLY:

I do not know the bearer from Adam's off ox; all I know about him is that he has all the outward marks of a gentleman, the courage of a bear-cat, a sense of humor and a head for which the Presidente of Sobrante will gladly pay a considerable number of *pesos oro*. Don't give up the head, because I like it and we do not need the money—yet. Take him ashore without anybody knowing it; hide him, clothe him, feed him—then forget all about him.

Ever thine,

J. S. WEBSTER.

"Kick the boat ahead again, Cafferty," Billy ordered quietly. He turned to the late arrival.

"Mr. Man, your credentials are all in apple-pie order. Do you happen to know this bay is swarming with man-eating sharks?"

The man raised a fine, strong, youthful face and grinned at him. "Hobson's choice, Mr. Geary," he replied. "Afloat or ashore, the sharks are after me. Sir, I am your debtor." He crawled into the cabin and stretched out on the settee as John Stuart Webster's voice came floating across the dark waters.

"Hey, Billy!"

"Hey, yourself!"

"Everything well with you, Billy?"

"All is lovely, Jack, and the goose honks high. By the way, that friend of yours called with his letter of introduction. I took care of him."

"Thanks. I suppose you'll call for me in that launch to-morrow morning?"

"Surest thing you know, Jack. Good-night, old top."

"Good-night, Billy. See you in the morning."

Don Juan Cafetéra swung the launch and headed back for the city. At Leber's little dock Billy stepped ashore, while Don Juan backed out into the dark bay again in order to avoid inquisitive visitors. Billy hastened to El Buen Amigo and returned presently with a bundle of clothes; at an agreed signal Don Juan kicked the launch into the dock again and Billy went aboard.

"Hat, shirt, necktie, duck suit, white socks, and shoes," he whispered. "Climb into them, stranger."

Once more the launch backed out in the bay, where

Webster's *protégé* dressed at his leisure, and Billy handed Don Juan a couple of pesos.

"Remember, John," he cautioned the bibulous one as they tied up for the night, "nothing unusual happened to-night."

"Divil a thing, Misther Geary. Thank you, sor," the Gaelic wreck replied blithely and disappeared in the darkness, leaving Billy to guide the stranger to El Buen Amigo, where he was taken into the confidence of Mother Jenks and, on Billy's guarantee of the board bill, furnished with a room and left to his own devices.

John Stuart Webster came down the gangplank into Leber's launch hard on the heels of the port doctor.

"You young horse-thief," he cried affectionately. "I believe it's the custom down this way for men to kiss each other. We'll dispense with that, but by——" He folded Billy in a paternal embrace, then held him at arm's length and looked him over.

"Lord, son," he said, "you're as thin as a snake. I'll have to feed you up."

As they sped toward the landing, he looked Billy over once more. "I have it," he declared. "You need a change of climate to get rid of that malaria. Just show me this little old mining claim of yours, Bill, and then hike for God's country. Three months up there will put you right again, and by the time you get back, we'll be about ready to weigh the first clean-up."

Billy shook his head. "I'd like to mighty well, Jack," he replied, "but I just can't."

"Huh! I suppose you don't think I'm equal to the task of straightening out this concession of yours and making a hummer out of it, eh?"

The young fellow looked across at him sheepishly. "Mine?" he jeered. "Who's talking about a mine. I'm thinking of a girl!"

"Oh!"

"Some girl, Johnny."

"I hope she's not some parrakeet," Webster bantered. "Have you looked up her pedigree?"

"Ah-h-h!" Billy spat over the side in sheer disgust. "This is an American girl—born here, but white—raised in the U. S. A. I've only known her three weeks, but—ah!" And Billy kissed his hand into space.

"Well, I'm glad I find you so happy, boy. I suppose you're going to let your old Jack-partner give her the once-over and render his report before you make the fatal leap—eh?"

"Sure! I want you to meet her. I've been telling her all about you, and she's crazy to meet you."

"Good news! I had a good friend once—twice—three times—and lost him every time. Wives get so suspicious of their husband's single friends, you know, so I hope I make a hit with your heart's desire, Billy. When do you pull off the wedding?"

"Oh," said Billy, "that's premature, Jack. I haven't asked her. How could I until I'm able to support her?"

"Look here, son," Webster replied, "don't you go to work and be the kind of fool I was. You get married and take a chance. If you do, you'll have a son sprouting into manhood when you're as old as I. A man ought to marry young, Bill. Hang the odds. I know what's good for you."

At the hotel, while Webster shaved and arrayed himself in an immaculate white duck suit, with a broad black silk belt, buck shoes, and a Panama hat, Billy sent a note to Dolores, apprising her that John Stuart Webster had arrived—and would she be good enough to receive them?

Miss Ruey would be that gracious. She was waiting for them in the veranda just off the *patio*, outwardly calm, but inwardly a foment of conflicting emotions. As they approached she affected not to see them and turning, glanced in the opposite direction; nor did she move her head until Billy's voice, speaking at her elbow, said:

"Well, Dolores, here's my old Jack-partner waiting to be introduced. Jack, permit me to present Miss Dolores Ruey."

She turned her face and rose graciously, marking with secret triumph the light of recognition that leaped to his eyes, hovered there the hundredth part of a second and departed, leaving those keen, quizzical blue orbs appraising her in the most natural manner imaginable. Webster bowed.

"It is a great happiness to meet you, Miss Ruey," he said gravely.

Dolores gave him her hand. "You have doubt-

less forgotten, Mr. Webster, but I think we have met before."

"Indeed!" John Stuart Webster murmured interestedly. "So stupid of me not to remember. Where did we meet?"

"He has a profound sense of humour," she soliloquized. "He's going to force me into the open. Oh, dear, I'm helpless." Aloud she said: "On the train in Death Valley last month, Mr. Webster. You came aboard with whiskers."

Webster shook his head slowly, as if mystified. "I fear you're mistaken, Miss Ruey. I cannot recall the meeting, and if I ever wore whiskers, no human being would ever be able to recognize me without them. Besides, I wasn't on the train in Death Valley last month. I was in Denver—so you must have met some other Mr. Webster."

She flushed furiously. "I didn't think I could be mistaken," she answered a trifle coldly.

"It is my misfortune that you were," he replied graciously. "Certainly, had we met at that time, I should not have failed to recognize you now. Somehow, Miss Ruey, I never have any luck."

She was completely outgeneralled, and having the good sense to realize it, submitted gracefully. "He's perfectly horrible," she told herself, "but at least he can lie like a gentleman—and I always did like that kind of man."

So they chatted on the veranda until luncheon was announced and Dolores left them to go to her room.

"Well?" Billy queried the moment she was out of earshot. "What do you think, Johnny?"

"I think," said John Stuart Webster slowly, "that you're a good picker, Bill. She's my ideal of a fine young woman, and my advice to you is to marry her. I'll grub-stake you. Bill, this stiff collar is choking me; I wish you'd wait here while I go to my room and rustle up a soft one."

In the privacy of his room John Stuart Webster sat down on his bed and held his head in his hands, for he had just received a blow in the solar plexus and was still groggy; there was an ache in his head, and the quizzical light had faded from his eyes. Presently, however, he pulled himself together and approaching the mirror looked long at his weather-beaten countenance.

"Too old," he murmured, "too old to be dreaming dreams."

He changed to a soft collar, and when he descended to the *patio* to join Billy once more he was, to all outward appearances, his usual unperturbed self, for his was one of those rare nátures that can derive a certain comfort from the misery of self-sacrifice—and in that five minutes alone in his room John Stuart Webster had wrestled with the tragedy of his life and won.

He had resolved to give Billy the right of way on the highway to happiness.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

LATE in the afternoon of the day of his arrival in Buenaventura, in the cool recess of the deep veranda flanking the western side of the *patio* of the Hotel Mateo, John Stuart Webster sat in a wicker chair, cigar in mouth, elbows on knees, hands clasping a light Malacca stick, with the end of which he jabbed meditatively at a crack in the recently sprinkled tiled floor, as if punctuating each bitter thought that chased its predecessor through his somewhat numbed brain.

In Mr. Webster's own whimsical phraseology, his clock had been fixed, on the instant he recognized in the object of his youthful partner's adoration the same winsome woman he had enthroned in his own secret castle of love. From that precise second Billy's preserve was as safe from encroachment by his friend as would be a bale of Confederate currency in an armour-steel vault on the three-thousand-foot level of a water-filled mine. Unfortunately for Webster, however, while he knew himself fairly well, he was not aware of this at the time. Viewed in the light of calmer reflection, Mr. Webster was quite certain he had made a star-spangled monkey of himself.

He sought solace now in the fact that there had

been mitigating circumstances. Throughout the entire journey from the steamer to the hotel, Billy had not once mentioned in its entirety the name of his adored one. In any Spanish-American country the name Dolores is not so uncommon as to excite suspicion; and Webster, who had seen the mercurial William in and out of many a desperate love affair in the latter's brittle teens and early twenties, attached so little importance to this latest outbreak of the old disease that it did not occur to him to cross-examine Billy, after eliciting the information that the young man had not lost his heart to a local belle.

The knowledge that Billy's inamorata was an American girl served to clear what threatened to be a dark atmosphere, and so Webster promptly had dismissed the subject.

Any psychologist will tell one that it is quite possible for a person to dream, in the short space of a split second, of events which, if really consummated, would involve the passage of days, weeks, months, or even years! Now, Jack Webster was an extra fast thinker, asleep or awake, and in his mind's eye, as he sat there in the *patio*, he had a dreadful vision of himself with a delicate spray of lilies of the valley in the lapel of his dress coat, as he supported the malarial Billy to the altar, there to receive the promise of Dolores to love, honour, and obey until death them did part. As the said Billy's dearest friend and business associate—as the only logical single man available—the job was Webster's without a

struggle. *Diablo!* Why did people persist in referring to such runners-up in the matrimonial handicap as *best* men, when at the very least calculation the groom was the winner?

That wedding party was the very least of the future events Mr. Webster's hectic imagination conjured up. In the course of time (he reflected), a baby would doubtless arrive to bless the Geary household. Godfather? John Stuart Webster, of course. And when the fruit of that happy union should be old enough to "ride horsey," who but the family friend would be required to get down on all fours and accommodate the unconscious tyrant? Boy or girl, it would make no difference; whichever way the cat jumped, he would be known as Uncle Jack; Billy would drag him up to the house once or twice a week, and he would go for the sake of the baby; then they would make him stay all night, and Mrs. Billy would sigh and try to smile when she detected cigarette ashes on the chiffonier in the spare bedroom—infallible sign that there was a bachelor about. Besides, happily married women have a mania for marrying off their husband's bachelor friends, and Mrs. Billy might scout up a wife for him—a wife he didn't want —and——

No, he would *not* be the family friend. Nobody should ever Uncle Jack him if he could help it, and the only way to avoid the honour would be to eschew the job of best man, to resolve, in the very beginning of things, to beware of entangling friendships. Thus, as in a glass darkly, John Stuart Webster, in one

illuminating moment, saw his future, together with his sole avenue of escape.

All too forcibly Webster realized that Billy's bally-hooing must have created a favourable impression in Dolores's mind prior to the arrival of the victim; hence it seemed reasonable to presume that when she discovered in Billy Geary's Jack Webster her own soiled, ragged, bewhiskered, belligerent, battered knight, Sir John Stuart Webster of Death Valley, California, U. S. A., extreme measures would have to be taken instantly to save the said Webster from being spattered with a dear old friendship in the future—and a dear old friendship with Dolores Ruey was something he did not want, had never figured on, and shuddered at accepting. All things considered, it had appeared wise to him to challenge, politely but firmly, her suggestion that they had met.

Of course, Webster had not really thought all this at the time; he had felt it and acted entirely upon instinct. A little private cogitation, however, had served to straighten out his thinking apparatus and convince him that he had acted hastily—wherefore he would (a still, small voice whispered) repent at leisure. Dolores had not pressed the question (he was grateful to her for that), and for as long as five minutes he had congratulated himself on his success in "putting it over" on her. Then he had caught her scrutinizing the knuckles of his right hand; following her glance, he had seen that the crests of two knuckles were slightly bluish and tender, as new skin has a habit of showing on tanned knuckles. With a

sinking heart he had recalled how painfully and deeply he had lacerated those knuckles less than a month before on the strong white teeth of a fat male masher, and while the last ugly shred of evidence had dropped off a week before, nevertheless to the critical and discerning eye there was still faint testimony of that fateful joust—just sufficient to convict!

He had glanced at her swiftly; she had caught the glance and replied to it with the faintest possible gleam of mischievous challenge in her glorious brown orbs; whereupon John Stuart Webster had immediately done what every honest male biped has been doing since Adam told his first lie to Eve—blushed, and had drawn a little taunting smile for his pains.

As Solomon once remarked, the wicked flee when no man pursueth; and that smile had scarcely faded before John Stuart Webster had unanimously resolved upon the course he should have pursued in the first place. He would investigate Billy's mining concession immediately; provided it should prove worth while, he would finance it and put the property on a paying basis; after which he would see to it that the very best doctors in the city of Buenaventura should inform Billy, unofficially and in the strictest confidence, that if he desired to preserve the life of Señor Juan Webstaire, he should forthwith pack that rapidly disintegrating person off to a more salubrious climate.

Having made his decision, John Stuart Webster immediately took heart of hope and decided to lead

trumps. He leaned over and slapped Billy Geary's knee affectionately.

"Well, Bill, you saffron-coloured old wreck, how long do you suppose it will take for you to pick up enough strength and courage to do some active mining? You're looking like food shot from guns."

"Billy needs a vacation and a change of climate," Dolores declared with that motherly conviction all womankind feels toward a sick man.

"So I do, Dolores," Billy replied. "And I'm going to take it. Up there in the hills back of San Miguel de Padua, the ubiquitous mosquito is not, the climate is almost temperate—and 'tis there that I would be."

"You can't start too soon to please me, Billy," Webster declared. "I'm anxious to get that property on a paying basis, so I can get out of the country."

"Why, Johnny," the amazed Billy declared, "I thought you would stay and help run the mine."

"Indeed! Well, why do you suppose I spent so much time teaching you how to run a mine, you young idiot, if not against just such a time as this? You found this concession and tied it up; I'll finance it and help you get everything started; but after that, I'm through, and you can manage it on salary and name the salary yourself. You have a greater interest in this country than I, William; and so with your kind permission we'll hike up to that concession tomorrow and give it the double-O; then, if I can O. K. the property, we'll cable for the machinery I ordered

just before I left Denver, and get busy. We ought to have our first clean-up within ninety days. What kind of labour have you in this country? Anything worth while? If not, we'll have to import some white men that can do things."

"Gosh, but you're in a hurry," Billy murmured. He had been long enough in Sobrante to have acquired a touch of the *mañana* spirit of the lowlands, and he disliked exceedingly the thought of having his courtship interrupted on a minute's notice.

"You know me, son. I'm a hustler on the job," Webster reminded him brutally; "so the sooner you start, the sooner you can get back and accumulate more malaria. What accommodations have you up there?"

"None, Jack."

"Then you had better get some, Billy. I think you told me we have to take horses at San Miguel de Padua to ride in to the mine." Billy nodded. "Then you had better buy a tent and bedding for both of us, ship the stuff up to San Miguel de Padua, go up with it and engage horses, a good cook, and a couple of reliable *mozos*. When you have everything ready, telegraph me and I'll come up."

"Why can't you come up with me?" Billy demanded.

"I have to see a man, and write some letters and send a cablegram and wait for an answer. I may have to loaf around here for two or three days. By the way, what did you do for that friend I sent to letter of introduction?"

"Exactly what you told me to do, Johnny."

"Where is he now?"

"At El Buen Amigo—the same place where I'm living."

"All right. We'll not discuss business any more, because we have finished with the business in hand—at least I have, Billy. When you get back to your hostelry, you might tell my friend I shall expect him over to dine with me this evening, if he can manage it."

For an hour they discussed various subjects; then Billy, declaring the siesta was almost over and the shops reopening as a consequence, announced his intention of doing his shopping, said good-bye to Dolores and Webster, and lugubriously departed on the business in hand.

"Why are you in such a hurry, Mr. Webster?" Dolores demanded. "You haven't been in Buenaventura six hours until you've managed to make me perfectly miserable."

"I'm terribly sorry. I didn't mean to."

"Didn't you know Billy Geary is my personal property?"

"No, but I suspected he might be. Bill's generous that way. He never hesitates to give himself to a charming woman."

"This was a case of mutual self-defense. Billy hasn't any standing socially, you know. I believe he has been seen shooting craps—isn't that what you call it?—with gentlemen of more or less colour; then he appeared in public with me, minus a chaperon——"

"Fooey!"

"Likewise fiddlesticks! I should have had the *entrée* to the society of my father's old friends but for that; when old Mrs. General Maldonado lectured me (the dear, aristocratic soul conceived it to be her duty) on the impropriety of appearing on the Malecon with Billy and my guardian, who happens to be Billy's landlady, I tried to explain our American brand of democracy, but failed. So I haven't been invited anywhere since, and life would have been very dull without Billy. He has been a dear—and you have taken him away."

Webster laughed. "Well, be patient, Miss Ruey, and I'll give him back to you with considerably more money than he will require for your joint comfort. Billy in financial distress is a joy forever, but Billy in a top hat and a frock coat on the sunny side of Easy Street will be absolutely irresistible."

"He's a darling. Ever since my arrival he has dedicated his life to keeping me amused." She rose. "Despite your wickedness, Mr. Webster, I am going to be good to you. Billy and I always have five o'clock tea here in the veranda. Would you care to come to my tea-party?"

"Nothing could give me greater pleasure," he assured her.

She nodded brightly to him. "I'm going to run up to my room and put some powder on my nose," she explained.

"But you'll return before five o'clock?" Webster was amazed to hear himself plead.

"You do not deserve such consideration, but I'll come back in about twenty minutes," she answered and left him in the spot where we find him at the opening of this chapter, in pensive mood, jabbing his Malacca stick into a crack in the tiled floor.

Presently Webster shuddered. "Good heavens," he soliloquized, "what a jackass-play I made when I declined to admit we had met before. What harm could I have accomplished by admitting it? I must be getting old, because I'm getting cowardly. I'm afraid of myself! When I met that girl last month, it was in a region that God forgot—and I was a human caterpillar, which a caterpillar is a hairy, lowly, unlovely thing that crawls until it is metamorphosed into a butterfly and flies. Following out the simile, I am now a human butterfly, not recognizable as the caterpillar to one woman out of ten million; yet she pegs me out at first. Gad, but she's a remarkable girl! And now I'm in for it. I've aroused her curiosity; and being a woman, she will not rest until she has fathomed the reason back of my extraordinary conduct. I think I'm going to be smeared with confusion. A spineless man like you, Johnny Webster, stands as much show in a battle of wits with that woman as a one-legged white man at a coon cakewalk. I'm afraid of her, and I'm afraid of myself. I'm glad I'm going up to the mine. I'll go as quickly as I can, and stay as long as I can."

As Webster viewed the situation, his decision to see

as little as possible of Dolores during his brief stay in Sobrante was a wise one. The less he saw of her (he told himself), the better for his peace of mind, for he was forty years old, and he had never loved before. For him this fever that burned in his blood, this delicious agony that throbbed in his heart—and all on the very ghost of provocation—were so many danger-signals, heralds of that grand passion which, coming to a man of forty, generally lasts him the remainder of his natural existence.

"This certainly beats the Dutch!" he murmured, and beyond the peradventure of a doubt, it did. He reflected that all of his life the impulses of his generous nature had been his undoing. In an excess of paternalism he had advised Billy to marry the girl and not permit himself to develop into a homeless, childless, loveless man such as Exhibit A, there present; following his natural inclination to play any game, red or black, he had urged Billy to marry the girl immediately and had generously offered a liberal subsidy to make the marriage possible, for he disliked any interference in his plans to make those he loved happy. And now——

Webster was forced to admit he was afraid of himself. His was the rapidly disappearing code of the old unfettered West, that a man shall never betray his friend in thought, word, or deed. To John Stuart Webster any crime against friendship was the most heinous in all the calendar of human frailty; even to dream of slipping into Billy's shoes now would be monstrous; yet Webster knew he could not

afford a test of strength between his ancient friendship for Billy and his masculine desire for a perfect mate. Remained then but one course:

"I must run like a road-runner," was the way Webster expressed it.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

DOLORES had been gone an hour before Webster roused from his bitter introspection sufficiently to glance at his watch. "Hum-m-m!" he grunted disapprovingly.

"Oh, I've been here fully half an hour," Dolores's voice assured him. He turned guiltily and found her leaning against the jamb in a doorway behind him and farther down the veranda. She was gazing at him with that calm, impersonal yet vitally interested glance that had so captivated him the first time he saw her.

"Well, then"—bluntly—"why didn't you say so?"

"The surest way to get oneself disliked is to intrude on the moods of one's friends. Moreover, I wanted to study you in repose. Are you quite finished talking to yourself and fighting imaginary enemies? If so, you might talk to me for a change; I'll even disagree with you on any subject, if opposition will make you any happier."

He rose and indicated the chair. "Please sit down, Miss Ruey. You are altogether disconcerting —too confoundedly smart. I fear I'm going to be afraid of you until I know you better."

She shrugged adorably and took the proffered

chair. "That's the Latin in her—that shrug," Webster thought. "I wonder what other mixtures go to make up that perfect whole."

Aloud he said: "So you wanted to study me in repose? Why waste your time? I am never in repose."

"Feminine curiosity, Mr. Webster. Billy has talked so much of you that I wanted to see if you measured up to the specifications."

"I don't mind your looking at me, Miss Ruey, but I get fidgety when you look through me." He was glad he said that, because it made her laugh —more immoderately, Webster thought, than the circumstances demanded. Nevertheless he had an insane desire to make her laugh like that again, to watch her mobile features run the gamut from sweet, nunlike repose to mirthful riot.

"I can't help it—really," she protested. "You're so transparent."

Mr. Webster reflected that doubtless she was right. Men in his fix generally were pitifully obvious. Nevertheless he was nettled. "Oh, I'm not so sure of that. I was just accusing myself of being a bonehead, and bone is opaque."

"Perhaps I have an X-ray eye," she replied demurely. "However, just to show you how easy you are to read, I'll not look at your silly head. Just let me have your hand, and I'll tell you all about yourself."

"Is there any charge?"

"Yes, a nominal one. However, I guarantee a truthful reading; if, when I am through, you are not

wholly satisfied, you do not have to pay the price. Is that a satisfactory arrangement?"

"Right as a fox," he declared, and held out his great calloused hand. He thrilled as she took it in both of hers, so soft and beautiful, and flattened it out, palm upward, on her knee. "A fine, large, useful hand," she commented musingly. "The callouses indicate recent hard manual toil with a pick and shovel; despite your recent efforts with soap and brush and pumice-stone, there still remain evidences of some foreign matter ingrained in those callous spots. While, of course, I cannot be certain of my diagnosis without a magnifying glass, I venture the conjecture that it is a mineral substance, and your hands are so tanned one can readily see you have been working in the sun—in a very hot sun, as a matter of fact. Inasmuch as the hottest sun I ever felt was in Death Valley, as I crossed it on the train last month, your hand tells me you have been there.

"The general structure of the hand indicates that you are of a peace-loving disposition, but are far from being a peace-at-any-price advocate." She flipped his hand over suddenly. "Ah, the knuckles confirm that last statement. They tell me you will fight on provocation; while your fingers are still stiff and thick from your recent severe labours, nevertheless they indicate an artistic nature, from which I deduce that upon the occasion when you were in conflict last your opponent received a most artistic thrashing."

Webster twitched nervously. "Skip the coarse

side of my nature," he pleaded, "and tell me something nice about myself."

"I am coming to that. This line indicates that you are very brave, gentle, and courteous. You are quick and firm in your decisions, but not always right, because your actions are governed by your heart instead of your head. Once you have made a decision, you are reckless of the consequences. Your lifeline tells me you are close to fifty-three years of age——"

"Seeress, you're shooting high and to the right," he interrupted, for he did not relish that jab about his age. "I'll have you know I was forty years old last month, and that I can still do a hundred yards in twelve seconds flat—in my working clothes."

"Well, don't feel peeved about it, Mr. Webster. I am not infallible; the best you can hope for from me is a high percentage of hits, even if I did shoot high and to the right that time. In point of worldly experience you're a hundred and six years old but I lopped off fifty per cent. to be on the safe side. To continue: You are of an extremely chivalrous nature—particularly toward young ladies travelling without chaperons; you are kind, affectionate, generous to a fault, something of a spendthrift. You will always be a millionaire or a pauper, never anything between—at least for any great length of time."

"You've been talking to that callow Bill Geary." Mr. Webster's face was so red he was sensible of a distinct feeling of relief that she kept her face bent over his hand.

"I haven't. He's been talking to me. One may safely depend upon you to do the unexpected. Your matrimonial line is unbroken, proving you have never married, although right here the line is somewhat dim and frayed." She looked up at him suddenly. "You haven't been in love, have you?" she queried with childlike insouciance. "In love—and disappointed?"

He nodded, for he could not trust himself to speak.

"How sad!" she cooed sympathetically. "Did she marry another, or did she die?"

"She—she—yes, she died."

"Cauliflower-tongue, in all probability, carried her off, poor thing! However, to your fortune: You are naturally truthful and would not make a deliberate misstatement of fact unless you had a very potent reason for it. You are sensitive to ridicule; it irks you to be teased, particularly by a woman, although you would boil in oil rather than admit it. You never ask impertinent questions, and you dislike those who do; you are not inquisitive; you never question other people's motives unless they appear to have a distinct bearing on your happiness or prosperity; you resent it when anybody questions your motives, and anybody who knows your nature will not question them. However, you have a strong sense of sportsmanship, and when fairly defeated, whether in a battle of fists or a battle of wits, you never hold a grudge, which is one of the very nicest characteristics a man can have——"

"Or a woman," he suggested feebly.

"Quite right. Few woman have a sense of sportsmanship."

"You have."

"How do you know?"

"The witness declines to answer, on the ground that he might incriminate himself; also I object to the question because it is irrelevant, immaterial, and not cross-examination."

"Accepted. You stand a very good chance of becoming a millionaire in Sobrante, but you must beware of a dark man who has crossed your path——"

"Which one?" Webster queried mirthfully. "All coons look alike to me—Greasers also."

"Mere patter of our profession, Mr. Webster," she admitted, "tossed in to build up the mystery element and simulate wisdom. Fortune awaited you in the United States, but you put it behind you, at the call of friendship, for a fortune in Sobrante. Now you have reconsidered that foolish action and at this moment you are contemplating sending a cablegram to a fat old man who waddles when he walks, recalling your decision not to accept a certain proposition of a business nature. However, you are too late. The fat old man with the waddle has made other arrangements, and if you want to make money, you'll remain in Sobrante. I think that is all, Mr. Webster."

He was gazing at her with an expression composed of equal parts of awe, amazement, consternation, adoration, and blank stupidity.

"Well," she queried innocently, "to quote Billy's colloquial style: did I put it over?"

"You did very well for an amateur, but I'm a doubting Thomas. I have to poke my finger into the wound, so to speak, before I'll believe. About this fat old man who waddles when he walks: a really topnotch palmist could tell me his name."

"Well, I'm only an amateur, but still I think I might, to quote Billy again, make a stab at it. A little while ago you said I had a strong sense of sportsmanship. Do you care to bet me about ten dollars I cannot give you the fat party's initials—all three of them?"

He gazed at her owlishly. She was the most perfectly amazing girl he had ever met; he was certain she would win the ten dollars from him, but then it was worth ten dollars to know for a certainty whether she was perfect or possessed of a slight flaw; so he silently drew forth a wallet that would have choked a cow and skinned off a ten-dollar gold certificate of the United States of America.

"I'm game," he mumbled. "To quote Billy again: 'Put up or shut up.'"

"The fat gentleman's initials are E. P. J."

"By the twelve apostles, Peter, Simon——"

"Don't blaspheme, Mr. Webster."

He stood up and shook himself. "When you order the tea," he said very distinctly, "please have mine cold. I need a bracer after that. Take the ten. You've won it."

"Thanks, ever so much," she answered in a matter-of-fact tone, and tucked the bill inside her shirtwaist. "I am a very poor woman, and—Every little bit

added to what you've got makes just a little bit more,'" she carolled, swaying her lithe, beautiful body and snapping her fingers like a cabaret dancer.

He could have groaned with the futility of his overwhelming desire for her; it even occurred to him what a shame it was to waste a marvel like her on a callow young pup like Billy, who had fought so many deadly skirmishes with Dan Cupid that a post-impressionistic painting of the Geary heart must resemble a pincushion. Then he remembered that this was an ungenerous, a traitorous thought, and that he had not paid the lady her fee.

"Well, what's the tariff?" he asked.

"You really feel that I have earned a professional's fee?"

"Beyond a doubt."

She stood a moment gazing thoughtfully down at the tip of her little toe, struggling to be quite cool and collected in the knowledge that she was about to do a daring, almost a brazen thing—wondering with a queer, panicky little fluttering of her heart if he would think any the less of her for it.

"Well—I—that is——"

"The cauliflower ear is not unknown among pugilists in our own dear native land, but the cauliflower tongue appears to blossom exclusively in Sobrante," he suggested wickedly.

She bit her lips to repress a smile. "Since you have taken Billy away from me this evening, I shall make you take Billy's place this evening. After dinner you shall hire an open victoria with two little

white horses and drive me around the Malecon. There is a band concert to-night."

"If it's the last act of my wicked life!" he promised fervently. Strange to relate, in that ecstatic moment no thought of Billy Geary marred the perfect serenity of what promised to be the most perfectly serene night in history.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

THEY were seated at the tiny tea table when the sound of feet crunching the little shell-paved path through the *patio* caused Webster and Dolores to turn their heads simultaneously. Coming toward them was an individual who wore upon a head of flaming red a disreputable, conical-crowned straw sombrero; a soiled cotton camisa with the tails flowing free of his equally soiled khaki trousers, and sandals of the kind known as *alpargates* —made from the tough fibre of a plant of the cactus family and worn only by the very lowliest peons— completed his singular attire.

"Hello!" Webster murmured whimsically. "Look who's here!"

"One of Billy's friends and another reason why he has no social standing," Dolores whispered. "I believe he's going to speak to us."

Such evidently appeared to be the man's intention. He came to the edge of the veranda, swept his ruin of a hat from his red head and bowed with Castilian expansiveness.

"Yer pardon, Miss, for appearin' before you."

She smiled her forgiveness to what Webster now perceived to be an alcoholic wreck. He was about to dismiss the fellow with scant ceremony, when

Dolores, with that rich sense of almost masculine humour—a humour that was distinctly American—said sweetly:

"Mr. Webster, shake hands with Don Juan Cafetéro, *bon vivant* and man about town. Don Juan, permit me to present Mr. Webster, from somewhere in the United States. Mr. Webster is a mining partner of our mutual friend Mr. William Geary."

A long, sad descent into the Pit had, however, imbued Don Juan with a sense of his degradation; he was in the presence of a superior, and he acknowledged the introduction with a respectful inclination of his head.

"'Tis you I've called to see, Misther Webster, sor," he explained.

"Very well, old-timer. In what way can I be of service to you?"

"'Tis the other way around, sor, if ye plaze, an' for that same there's no charrge, seein' ye're the partner, av that fine, kind gintleman, Misther Geary Sure 'tis he that's the free-handed lad wit' his money whin he has it, God bless him, an' may the heavens be his bed, although be the same token I can see wit' the half av an eye that 'tis yerself thinks nothin' av a dollar, or five, for that matther. However, sor, that's neither here nor there. Did ye, whilst in New Orleans, have d'alings wit' a short, shtout spiggoty wit' a puckered scar undher his right eye?"

John Stuart Webster suddenly sat up straight and gazed upon the lost son of Erin with grave interest. "Yes," he replied, "I seem to recall such a man."

"Only another proof of my ability as a palmist," Dolores struck in. "Remember, Mr. Webster, I warned you to beware of a dark man that had crossed your path."

"An' well he may, Miss—well he may," Don Juan agreed gloomily. "'Tis none av me business, sor, but would ye mind tellin' me just what ye did to that spiggoty?"

"Why, to begin, last Sunday morning I interrupted this pucker-eyed fellow and a pop-eyed friend of his while engaged in an attempt to assassinate a white, inoffensive stranger. The following day, at the gangplank of the steamer, we met again; he poked his nose into my business, so I squeezed his nose until he cried; right before everybody I did it, Don Juan, and to add insult to injury, I plucked a few hairs from his rat's moustache—one hair per each pluck."

"I'd a notion ye did somethin' to him, sor. Now, thin, listen to me: I'm not much to look at, but I'm white. I'm an attashay, as ye might say, av Ignatz Leber—him that do have the import an' export house at the ind av the Calle San Rosario, forninst the bay. Also he do have charrge av the cable office, an' whin I'm sober enough, I deliver cablegrams for Leber. Now, thin, ye'll recall we had a bit av a shower to-day at noon?"

Dolores and Webster nodded. Don Juan, after glancing cautiously around, lowered his voice and continued: "I was deliverin' a cablegram for Leber, an' me course took me past the palace gate—which, be the same token, has sinthry-boxes both inside an'

out, wan on each side av the gate. The sinthry was not visible as I came along, an' what wit' the shower comin' as suddint as that, an' me wit' a wardrobe that's not so extinsive I can afford to get it wet, I shtepped into wan av the outside sintry-boxes till the rain should be over, an' what wit' a dhrink av *aguardiente* I'd took to brace me for the thrip, an' the mimory av auld times, I fell asleep.

"Dear knows how long I sat there napping; all I know is that I was awakened by the sound av three men talkin' at the gate, an' divil a worrd did they say but what I heard. They were talkin' in Spanish, but I undhershtood thim well enough. 'He's at the Hotel Mateo,' says wan voice, 'an' his name is Webster—Jawn Webster. He's an American, an' a big, savage-lookin' lad at that, so take me advice an' be careful. Do ye two keep an eye on him wherever he goes, an' if he should shtep out at night an' wandher t'rough a dark shtreet, do ye two see to it that he's put where he'll not interfere again in Don Felipe's affairs. No damn' gringo'—beggin' yer pardon, Miss—'can intherfere in the wurrk av the Intilligince Bureau at a time like this, in addition to insultin' our honoured chief, wit'out the necessity av bein' measured for a coffin.' '*Si, mi general,*' says another lad, an 'To be sure, *mi general,*' says a thirrd; an' wit' that the gineral, bad cess to him, wint back to the palace an' the other two walked on up the *calle* an' away from the sinthry-box."

"Did you come out and follow them?" Webster demanded briskly.

"Faith, I did. Wan av them is Francisco Arredondo, a young cavalry lootinint, an' the other wan is Captain José Benevides, him that do be the best pistol-shot an' swordsman in the spiggoty army. 'Twas him that kilt auld Gineral Gonzales in a djuel a month ago."

"What kind of looking man is this Benevides, my friend?"

"A tall, thin young man, wit' a dude's moustache an' a diamond ring on his right hand. He do be whiter nor most. Have a care would ye meet him around the city an' let him pick a fight wit' ye. An' have a care, sor, would ye go out av a night."

"Thank you, Don Juan. You're the soul of kindness. What else do you know?"

"Well," Don Juan replied with a naïve grin, "I did know somethin' else, but shure, Misther Geary advised me to forget it. I was wit' him in the launch last night."

Webster stepped out of the veranda and laid a friendly hand on Don Juan Cafetéro's shoulder. "Don Juan," he said gently, "I'm going back to the United States very soon. Would you like to come with me?"

Don Juan's watery eyes grew a shade mistier, if possible. He shook his head. "Whin I'm dhrunk here, sor," he replied, "no wan pays any attintion to me, but in America they'd give me ten days in the hoosgow wanst a week. Thank you, sor, but I'll shtay here till the finish."

"There are institutions in America where hopeless inebriates, self-committed, may be sent for a couple of years. I believe 6 per cent. are permanently cured. You could be one of the six—and I'd cheerfully pay for it and give you a good job when you come out."

Don Juan Cafetéro shook his red head hopelessly. He knew the strength of the Demon and had long since ceased to fight even a rear-guard action. Webster put a hand under the stubbly chin and tilted Don Juan's head sharply. "Hold up your head," he commanded. "You're the first of your breed I ever saw who would admit he was whipped. Here's five dollars for you—five dollars gold. Take it and return with the piece intact to-morrow morning, Don Juan Cafetéro."

Don Juan Cafetéro's wondering glance met Webster's directly, wavered, sought the ground, but at a jerk on his chin came back and—stayed. Thus for at least ten seconds they gazed at each other; then Webster spoke. "Thank you," he said.

"Me name is John J. Cafferty," the lost one quavered.

"Round one for Cafferty," Webster laughed. "Good-bye now, until nine to-morrow. I'll expect you here, John, without fail." And he took the derelict's hand and wrung it heartily.

"Well," Webster remarked humorously to Dolores as he held out his cup for more tea, "if I'm not the original Tumble Tom, I hope I may never see the back of my neck."

"Do you attach any importance to Don Juan's story?" she asked anxiously.

"Yes, but not so much as Don Juan does. However, to be forewarned is to be forearmed." He sighed. "I am the innocent bystander," he explained, "and I greatly fear I have managed to snarl myself up in a Sobrantean political intrigue, when I haven't the slightest interest either way. However, that's only one more reason why I should finish my work here and get back to Denver."

"But how did all this happen, Mr. Webster?"

"Like shooting fish in a dry lake, Miss Ruey," Webster replied, and related to her in detail the story of his adventure with the Sobrantean assassins in Jackson Square and his subsequent meeting with Andrew Bowers aboard *La Estrellita.*

Dolores laughed long and heartily as Webster finished his humorous recital. "Oh, you're such a very funny man," she declared. "Billy told me God only made one Jack Webster and then destroyed the mold; I believe Billy is right. But do tell me what became of this extraordinary and unbidden guest."

"The night the steamer arrived in port, Billy and Don Juan came out in a launch to say 'Hello,' so I seized upon the opportunity to tell Andrew to jump overboard and swim to the launch. Gave him a little note to Billy—carried it in his mouth—instructing Billy to do the right thing by him—and Billy did it. I don't know what Andrew is up to and I don't care. Where I was raised we let every man roll his own hoop. All I hope is that they don't

shoot Andrew. If they do, I fear I'll weep. He's certainly a skookum lad. Do you know, Miss Ruey, I love anybody that can impose on me—make a monkey out of me, in fact—and make me like it?"

"That's so comforting," she remarked dryly.

Webster looked at her sharply, suspiciously; her words were susceptible of a dual interpretation. Her next sentence, however, dissipated this impression. "Because it confirms what I told you this afternoon when I read your palm," she added.

"You didn't know how truly you spoke when you referred to the dark man that had crossed my path. He's uncomfortably real—drat him!"

"Then you are really concerned?"

"Not at all, but I purpose sleeping with one eye open. I shan't permit myself to feel concerned until they send more than two men after me—say eight or ten. A husky American ought to be willing to give these spiggoties a pull in the weights."

His indifference appalled her; she leaned forward impulsively and laid a hand on his forearm. "But you must heed Don Juan's warning," she declared seriously. "You must not go out alone at night."

He grinned boyishly. "Of course not, Miss Ruey. You're going to ride out with me this evening."

"I'm not. Don Juan's report has spoiled all that. I'll not subject you to risk."

"Very well; then I shall drive out alone."

"You're a despot, Mr. Webster—a regular despot."

"Likewise a free agent."

"I'll go with you."

"I thought so."

"You're—you're——"

He rose while she was searching for the right word. "Will you excuse me until after dinner, Miss Ruey? I'd love to stay and chat with you, even though it does appear that presently we shall be calling each other names, but the fact of the matter is—well, I am in a very serious predicament, and I might as well start right now to prepare to meet any emergency. For what hour shall I order the carriage?"

"Seven-thirty. After all, they'll not dare to murder you on the Malecon."

"I agree with you. It will have to be done very quietly, if at all. You've been mighty nice to me this afternoon, seeress; I shall be grateful right up to the moment of dissolution."

"Speak softly but carry a big stick," she warned him.

"A big gun," he corrected here, "—two of them, in fact."

"Sensible man! I'm not going to worry about you, Mr. Webster." She nodded her permission for him to retire, and as he walked down the veranda and into the hotel, her glance followed him with pardonable feminine curiosity, marking the breadth of his shoulders, the quick, springy stride, the alert, erect poise of his head on the powerful neck.

"A doer of deeds are you, John Stuart Webster," she almost whispered. "As Kipling would say: '*Wallah!* But you are a man!'"

A stealthy footstep sounded below the veranda:

she turned and beheld Don Juan Cafetéro, his hat in his left hand, in his right a gold-piece which he held toward her.

"Take it, *allanah,*" he wheezed in his hoarse, drunkard's whisper. "Keep it f'r me till to-morrow, for sorra wan av me can I trust to do that same—an' be the same token I can't face that big man wit'out it."

"Why not, Don Juan?"

He hung his red head. "I dunno, Miss," he replied miserably. "Maybe 'tis on account av him—the eye av him—the way av him—divil such a man did I ever meet—God bless him! Shure, Misther Geary do be the fine lad, but he—he——"

"Mr. Geary never put a big forefinger under your chin and bade you hold up your head. Is that it?"

"'Tis not what he did, Miss, but the way he did it. All the fiends av hell'll be at me this night to shpend what he give me—and I—I'm afraid——"

He broke off, mumbling and chattering like a man in the grip of a great terror. In his agony of body and spirit, Dolores could have wept for Don Juan Cafetéro, for in that supreme moment the derelict's soul was bare, revealing something pure and sweet and human, for all his degradation. How did Jack Webster know? wondered Dolores. And why did he so confidently give an order to this human flotsam and expect it to be obeyed? And why did Don Juan Cafetéro come whining to her for strength to help him obey it? Through the murk of her girlish unsophistication and scant knowledge of human nature

these and other questions obtruded themselves, the while she gazed down at Don Juan's dirty, quivering hand that held the coin toward her. And presently the answer came—a quotation long since learned and forgotten:

> Be noble—and the nobleness that lies in other men,
> Sleeping but never dead,
> Will rise in majesty to meet thine own.

"I will not spoil his handiwork," she told herself, and she stepped down off the veranda to a position directly in front of Don Juan. "That wouldn't be playing the game," she told him. "I can't help you deceive him. You are the first of your breed——"

"Don't say it," he cried. "Didn't he tell me wanst?"

"Then make the fight, Don—Mr. Cafferty." She lowered her voice. "I am depending on you to stay sober and guard him. He needs a faithful friend so badly, now that Mr. Geary is away." She patted the grimy hand and left him staring at the ground. Presently he sighed, quivered horribly, and shambled out of the *patio* on to the firing-line. And when he reported to Jack Webster at nine o'clock next morning, he was sober, shaking horribly and on the verge of *delirium tremens*, but tightly clasped in his right hand he held that five-dollar piece. Dolores, who had made it her business to be present at the interview, heard John Stuart Webster say heartily:

"The finest thing about a terrible fight, friend Cafferty, is that if it is a worth-while battle, the

spoils of victory are exceedingly sweet. You are now about to enjoy one fourth of the said spoils—a large jolt of *aguardiente!* You must have it to steady your nerves. Go to the nearest *cantina* and buy one drink; then come back with the change. By that time I shall have breakfasted and you and I will then go shopping. At noon you shall have another drink; at four o'clock another; and just before retiring you shall have the fourth and last for this day. Remember, Cafferty: one jolt—no more—and then back here with the exact change."

As Don Juan scurried for salvation, Webster turned to Dolores. "He'll fail me now, but that will not be his fault but mine. I've set him too great a task in his present weakened condition. In the process of exchanging American gold for the local shin-plasters, he'll skin me to death and emerge from the transaction with a full quart bottle in excess of his drink. Nevertheless, to use a colloquial expression, I have the Cafferty goat—and I'm going to keep it."

Webster went immediately to his room, called for pen and paper, and proceeded at once to do that which he had never done before—to wit, prepare his last will and testament. For the first time in his career death threatened while he had money in his possession, and while he had before him for performance a task requiring the expenditure of money, his manifest duty, therefore, was to guarantee the performance of that task, win, lose, or draw in the game of life; so in a few brief paragraphs John Stuart

Webster made a holographic will and split his bankroll equally between the two human beings he cared for most—Billy Geary and Dolores Ruey. "Bill's a gambler like me," he ruminated; "so I'll play safe. The girl is a conservative, and after Bill's wad is gone, he'd be boiled in oil before he'd prejudice hers."

Having made his will, Webster made a copy of it. The original he placed in an envelope, sealed, and marked: "Last Will and Testament of John S. Webster, of Denver, Colorado, U. S. A. To be delivered to William H. Geary upon the death of the testator." The copy he also placed in an envelope marked: "From Jack. Not to be opened until after my death." This envelope he then enclosed in a larger one and mailed to Billy at Calle de Concordia No. 19.

Having made his few simple preparations for death, Mr. Webster next burrowed in his trunk, brought forth his big army-type automatic pistol and secured it in a holster under his arm, for he deemed it unwise and provocative of curiosity to appear in immaculate ducks that bulged at the right hip. Next he filled two spare clips with cartridges and slipped them into his pocket, thus completing his few simple preparations for life.

He glanced out the window at the sun. There would still be an hour of daylight; so he descended to the lobby, called a carriage and drove to the residence of the American consulate.

Lemuel Tolliver, formerly proprietor of a small retail wood and coal yard in Hastings, Nebraska, was

the consul. He talked through his nose, employed double negatives, chewed tobacco, wore celluloid cuffs and collar, and received Mr. Webster in his shirt sleeves. He was the type of small-town peanut politician who never forgets for an instant that to be an American is greater than to be a king, and who strives assiduously to exhibit his horrible idea of American democracy to all and sundry, to his own profound satisfaction and the shame of his visiting countrymen.

He glanced at the card which Webster had sent in by his clerk. "Well, sir!" he began briskly. "Delighted to know you, Mr. Webster. Ain't there nothin' I can do for you?"

"Thank you. There is. This is my will. Please put it in your safe until I or my executor shall call for it."

"What!" boomed the Honourable Tolliver. "You ain't thinkin' o' dyin', are yuh?" he laughed.

"Listen," Webster urged him, and Mr. Tolliver helped himself to a fresh bite of chewing-tobacco and inclined his head. Briefly, but without omitting a single important detail, Webster told the consul of his adventure in New Orleans with the secret service representative of the Republic of Sobrante. "And not an hour since," he concluded, "I was informed, through a source I consider reliable, that I am in momentary danger of assassination at the hands of two men whose names I know."

"Well, don't tell me nothin' about it," Mr. Tolliver interrupted. "I'm here on Government affairs, not

to straighten out private quarrels. If you're figurin' on gittin' killed, my advice to you is to git out o' the country P. D. Q."

"You overlook the fact that I didn't come here for advice, my dear Mr. Consul," Webster reminded him with some asperity. "I'm not at all afraid of getting killed. What is worrying me is the certainty that I'll get there first with the most guns, and if I should, in self-defense, be forced to eliminate two Sobrantean army officers, I want to know what you're going to do to protect me. I want to make an affidavit that my life is in danger; I want my witness to make a similar affidavit, and I want to file those affidavits with you, to be adduced as evidence to support my plea of self-defense. In other words, I want to have these affidavits, with the power of the United States back of them, to spring in case the Sobrantean government tries to railroad me for murder—and I want you to spring them for me."

"I won't do nothin' o' the kind," Mr. Tolliver declared bluntly. "You got plenty o' chance to get out o' this country an 'save international complications. *La Estrellita* pulls out to-morrow mornin', an' you pull with her, or stay an' take your own chances. I ain't prejudicin' my job by makin' myself *nux vomica* to the Sobrantean government—an' that's just what will happen if I mix up in this private quarrel."

"But, my dear Mr. Consul, I am going into business here—the mining business. I have every right in this country, and it is your duty to protect my

rights while here. I can't side-step a fight just to hold you in your job."

"It's a matter outside my jurisdiction," Mr. Tolliver declared with such a note of finality in his voice that Webster saw the uselessness of further argument.

"All right," he replied, holding his temper as best he could. "I'm glad to know you think so much of your job. I may live long enough to find an opportunity to kick you out of it and run this consulate myself. I'll send my affidavits direct to the State department at Washington; you take orders from Washington, I dare say."

"When I get them. Good day."

John Stuart Webster left the American consulate in a frenzy of inarticulate rage in the knowledge that he was an American and represented in Sobrante by such an invertebrate as the Honourable Lemuel Tolliver. At the Hotel Mateo he dismissed the carriage, climbed the three short steps to the entrance and was passing through the revolving portal, when from his rear some one gave the door a violent shove, with the result that the turnstile partition behind him collided with his back with sufficient force to throw him against the partition in front. Instantly the door ceased to pivot, with Webster locked neatly in the triangular space between the two sections of the revolving door and the jamb.

He turned and beheld in the section behind him an officer of the Sobrantean army. This individual, observing he was under Webster's scrutiny, scowled and peremptorily motioned to Webster to proceed—

which the latter did, with such violence that the door, continuing to revolve, caught up with the Sobrantean and subjected him to the same indignity to which he had subjected Webster.

Once free of the door, Webster waited just inside the lobby for the Sobrantean to conclude his precipitate entrance. When he did, Webster looked him over with mild curiosity and bowed with great condescension. "Did any gentleman ever tell the señor that he is an ill-mannered monkey?" he queried coolly in excellent Spanish. "If not, I desire to give the señor that information, and to tell him that his size alone prevents me from giving him a nice little spanking."

"Pig!" the rude one answered hotly. His olive features paled with anger, he trembled with emotion and seemed undecided what to do—seeing which Webster grinned at him tantalizingly. That decided him. No Latin-American, with the exaggerated ego of his race, can bear even a suspicion of ridicule. The officer walked fiercely toward Webster and swung his arm toward the latter's face in an effort to land a slap that was "meant."

Webster merely threw back his head and avoided the blow; his long left arm shot out and beat down the Sobrantean's guard; then Webster's right hand closed around the officer's collar. "Come to me, thou insolent little one," he crooned, and jerked his assailant toward him, gathered him up in his arms, carried him, kicking and screaming with futile rage, out into the *patio* and soused him in the fountain.

"Now, then, spitfire, that will cool your hot head, I trust," he admonished his unhappy victim, and returned to the hotel. At the desk he paused.

"Who was that person I just bathed?" he inquired of the excited clerk.

"Ah, señor, you shall not long be kept in ignorance," that functionary informed him. "That is the terrible Captain Benavides——"

"Do you know, I had a notion it was he?" Webster replied ruminatively. "Well, I suppose I'm in for a duel now," he added to himself as he climbed the stairs to his room. "I think that will be most interesting."

John Stuart Webster changed into dry clothing and descended to the dining room. Miss Ruey was already seated at her table and motioned him to the seat opposite her, and as he sat down with a contented little sigh, she gazed at him with a newer and more alert interest.

"I hear you've been having adventures again," she challenged. "The news is all over the hotel. I heard it from the head waiter."

"Coffee and pistols for two at daylight," he answered cheerily. "Whenever I see trouble coming and realize that I cannot possibly avoid it, I generally take the bull by the horns, so to speak, and go forth to meet it. I have discovered from experience that the surprise of the attack generally disorganizes the other fellow, for few people care to fight an eager enemy. I see you have sampled the soup. Is it good?"

"Excellent. I marvel that your appetite is so keen, considering the gloomy outlook."

"Oh, there won't be any trouble," he assured her. "Duelling is silly, and I wouldn't engage in it on a bet. By the way, I have made my will, just to be on the safe side. Will you be good enough to take charge of it until after the funeral? You can turn it over to Billy then."

She fell readily into the bantering spirit with which he treated this serious subject. Indeed, it was quite impossible to do otherwise, for John Stuart Webster's personality radiated such a feeling of security, of absolute, unbounded confidence in the future and disdain for whatever of good fortune or ill the future might entail, that Dolores, found it impossible not to assimilate his mood.

At seven-thirty, after a delightful dinner, the memory of which Mr. Webster was certain would linger under his foretop long after every other memory had departed, he escorted her to the open carriage he had ordered, and for two hours they circled the Malecon with the élite of Buenaventura, listening to the music of the band, and during the brief intermissions, to the sound of the waves lapping the beach at the foot of the broad driveway.

"This," said John Stuart Webster, as he said good-night to Dolores in the lobby, "is the end of a perfect day."

It wasn't, for at that precise moment a servant handed him a card, and indicated a young man seated in an adjacent lounging-chair, at the same time

volunteering the information that the visitor had been awaiting Señor Webster's return for the past hour.

Webster glanced at the card and strode over to the young man. "I am Mr. Webster, sir," he announced civilly in Spanish. "And you are Lieutenant Arredondo?"

The visitor rose, bowed low and indicated he was that gentleman. "I have called, Mr. Webster," he stated in most excellent English, "in the interest of my friend and comrade, Captain Benavides."

"Ah, yes! The fresh little rooster I ducked in the fountain this evening. Well, what does the little squirt want now? Another ducking?"

Arredondo flushed angrily but remembered the dignity of his mission and controlled his temper. "Captain Benavides has asked me to express to you the hope that you, being doubtless a man of honour——"

"Stop right there, Lieutenant. There is no doubt about it. I *am* a man of honour, and unless you are anxious to be ducked in the fountain, you will be more careful in your choice of words. Now, then: You are about to say that, being a man of honour——"

"You would accord my friend the satisfaction which one gentleman never fails to accord another."

"That lets me out, *amigo*," Webster laughed. "Benavides isn't a gentleman. He's a cutthroat, a murdering little black-and-tan hound. Do I understand he wants me to fight a duel with him?"

Lieutenant Arredondo could not trust himself to speak, and so he bowed profoundly.

"Very well, then, Lieutenant," Webster agreed. "I'll fight him."

"To-morrow morning at five o'clock."

"Five minutes from now if you say so."

"Captain Benavides will be grateful for your willing spirit, at least," the second replied bitterly. "You realize, of course, Mr. Webster, that as the challenged party, the choice of weapons rests with you."

"Certainly. I wouldn't have risked a duel if the choice lay with the other fellow. With your permission, my dear sir, we'll fight with Mauser rifles at a thousand yards, for the reason that I never knew a greaser that could hit the broad side of a brewery at any range over two hundred and fifty yards." Webster chuckled fiendishly.

Lieutenant Arredondo bit his lips in anger and vexation. "I cannot agree to such an extraordinary duel," he complained. "Have you no other choice?"

"Well, since a fight at long range doesn't suit you, suppose we have one at close range. I propose that our seconds handcuff us together by our left wrists, give each of us a knife and leave us alone in a room for a couple of minutes."

"My friend, Captain Benavides, sir, is not a butcher," Arredondo reminded Mr. Webster acidly. "In such a fight as you describe, he would be at a great disadvantage."

"You're whistling—he would. I'd swing him around my head with my left hand and dash his fool brains out."

"It is the custom in Sobrante for gentlemen to fight with rapiers."

"Oh, dry up, you sneaking murderer," Webster exploded. "There isn't going to be any duel except on my terms—so you might as well take a straight tip from headquarters and stick to plain assassination. You and Benavides have been sent out by your superior to kill me—you got your orders this very afternoon at the entrance to the government palace—and I'm just not going to be killed. I don't like the way you part your hair, and I despise a man who uses cologne and wears his handkerchief up his sleeve; so beat it, boy, while the going is good." He pointed toward the hotel door. "Out, you blackguard!" he roared. "*Vaya!*"

Lieutenant Arredondo rose and with dignified mien started for the door. Webster followed, and as his visitor reached the portal, a tremendous kick, well placed, lifted him down to the sidewalk. Shrieking curses, he fled into the night; and John Stuart Webster, with a satisfied feeling that something accomplished had earned a night's repose, retired to his room and his mauve silk pyjamas, and slept the sleep of a healthy, conscience-free man. It did occur to him that the morrow would almost certainly bring forth something unpleasant, but that prospect did not worry him. John Stuart Webster had a religion all his own, and one of the principal tenets of this faith of his was an experience-born conviction that to-morrow is always another day.

At about the same hour Neddy Jerome, playing

solitaire in the Engineers' Club in Denver, was the recipient of a cablegram which read:

If W. cables accepting reply rejecting account job filled otherwise beans spilled. Implicit obedience spells victory.

HENRIETTA.

Neddy Jerome wiped his spectacles, adjusted them on his nose and read this amazing message once more. "Jumped-up Jehosophat!" he murmured. "If she hasn't followed that madcap Webster clear to Buenaventura! If she isn't out in earnest to earn her fee, I'm an orang-outang! By thunder, that's a smart woman. Evidently she has Jack winging; he is willing to return and go to work for me, but for reasons of her own she doesn't want him to win too easy a victory. Well, I guess she knows her own game better than I do; so I should worry how she plays it. 'Implicit obedience spells victory.' Victory means that crazy Webster takes the job I offered him. All right! I'll be implicitly obedient."

Two hours later Neddy Jerome received another cablegram. It was from John Stuart Webster and read as follows:

Hold job ninety days at latest may be back before. If satisfactory cable.

Again Mr. Jerome had recourse to the most powerful expletive at his command. "Henrietta knew he was going to cable and beat the old sour-dough to it," he soliloquized. He was wrapped in pro-

found admiration of her cunning for as much as five minutes; then he indicted this reply to his victim:

Time, tide and good jobs wait for no man. Sorry. Job already filled by better man.

When John Stuart Webster received that cablegram the following morning, he cursed bitterly—not because he had lost the best job that had ever been offered him, but because he had lost through playing a good hand poorly. He hated himself for his idiocy.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

FOR fully an hour after retiring John Stuart Webster slept the deep, untroubled sleep of a healthy, unworried man; then one of the many species of "jigger" which flourish just north and south of the equator crawled into bed with him and promptly proceeded to establish its commissary on the inner flank of the Websterian thigh, where the skin is thin and the blood close to the surface. As a consequence, Mr. Webster awoke suddenly, obliterated the intruder and got out of bed for the purpose of anointing the injured spot with alcohol—which being done, an active search of the bed resulted in the discovery of three more jiggers and the envelopment of John Stuart Webster's soul in the fogs of apprehension. Wide awake, he sat on the edge of the bed, massaging his toes and wondering what he should do about it. From a contemplation of his own case his mind wandered to Dolores Ruey. He wondered if the jiggers were picking on her, too—poor girl! Strange that Billy hadn't warned him against these infernal insects—probably it was because Billy resided at El Buen Amigo, where, for some mysterious reason, the jigger was not.

"'Tis an evil land, filled with trouble," he mused as he lighted a cigarette. "I wish Bill were here to

advise me. He's been long enough in this country to know the lay of the ground and all the government officials. He ought to be able to straighten this deal out and assure the higher-ups that I'm not butting in on their political affairs. But Bill's up-country and here I am under surveillance and unable to leave the hotel to talk it over with Andrew Bowers, the only other white expert I know of in town. And by the way, they're after Andrew, too! I wonder what for."

He smoked two more cigarettes, the while he pondered the various visible aspects of this dark mess in which he found himself floundering. And finally he arrived at a decision. He was well assured that his every movement was being watched and reported upon; doubtless the fact that he had gone to bed at ten o'clock had already been noted! "These chaps aren't thorough, though," Webster decided. "They'll see me safely to bed and pick me up again in the morning—so I'll take a chance that the coast is clear, slip out now and talk it over with Andrew."

He looked at his watch—eleven-thirty. [Hurriedly he dressed, strapped on his automatic pistol, dragged his bed noiselessly to the open window and tied to the bed-leg the rope he used to lash his trunk; then he lowered himself out the window. The length of rope permitted him to descend within a few feet of the ground, and he dropped with a light thud on to the soft earth of the *patio*. The thrifty landlord had already turned out all the electric lights, and the *patio* was dark.

Webster made his way to the street unnoticed, circled the block, found a policeman seated sound asleep on the curb of the narrow sidewalk, woke him up and inquired for the Calle de Concordia; and ten minutes later he appeared before the entrance of El Buen Amigo just as Mother Jenks was barring it for the night.

"I am Mr. Webster," he announced, "—Mr. Geary's friend from the United States."

Mother Jenks, having heard of him, was of course profoundly flustered to meet this toff who so carelessly wired his down-and-out friends *pesos oro* in lots of a thousand. Cordially she invited him within to stow a peg of her best, which invitation Mr. Webster promptly accepted.

"To your beautiful eyes," Webster toasted her. "And now would you mind leading me to the quarters of Billy's friend Mr. Bowers?"

Mother Jenks looked at him sharply. "Wot's up, sir?" she asked.

"Blessed if I know, Mrs. Jenks. I've come to find out."

"Then you've not come a second too soon, sir. 'E's leavin' at daylight. I'd better hannounce you, sir. 'E's particular wot company 'e receives."

She shuffled away, to return presently with the news that Mr. Bowers was in his room and would be delighted to receive Mr. Webster. Mother Jenks led Webster to the door, knocked, announced him and discreetly withdrew.

"My dear Webster!" cried Andrew Bowers en-

thusiastically, and he drew his late fellow-passenger into the room. Webster observed that Andrew was not alone. "I want to see you privately," he said. "Didn't know you had company, or I wouldn't have intruded."

"Well, I knew I had company, didn't I? Come in, you crazy fellow, and meet some good friends of mine who are very anxious to meet you," He turned to a tall, handsome, scholarly looking man of about forty, whose features, dress, and manner of wearing his whiskers proclaimed him a personage. "Dr. Eliseo Pacheco, I have the honour to present Mr. John S. Webster, the American gentleman of whom you have heard me speak."

Doctor Pacheco promptly leaped to his feet and bowed with ostentatious reverence; then suddenly, with Latin impulsiveness, he advanced upon Webster, swept aside the latter's outstretched hand, clasped John Stuart Webster in fraternal embrace, and to the old sour-dough's inexpressible horror, kissed him upon the right cheek—after which he backed off, bowed once more, and said in Spanish:

"Sir, my life is yours."

"It is well he gave it to you before you took it," Andrew said in English, and he laughed, noting Webster's confusion. "And this gentleman is Colonel Pablo Caraveo."

"Thunder, I'm in for it again," Webster thought—and he was, for the amiable colonel embraced Webster and kissed his left cheek before turning to Andrew.

"You will convey to our guest, in English, Don Ricardo, assurances of my profound happiness in meeting him," he said in Spanish.

"The Colonel says you're all to the mustard," Andrew at once interpreted merrily.

"Rather a liberal translation," Webster retorted in Spanish, whereat Colonel Caraveo sprang up and clapped his hands in delight. Evidently he had looked forward with considerable interest to meeting Webster and had had his contentment clouded by the thought that Andrew's gringo friend could not speak Spanish.

"Your happiness, my dear Colonel," Webster continued, "is extravagant grief compared with my delight in meeting a Sobrantean gentleman who has no desire to skewer me." He turned to Andrew. "While introductions are in order, old son, suppose you complete the job and introduce yourself. I'm always suspicious of a man with an alias."

"Then behold the death of that impudent fellow Andrew Bowers, late *valet de chambre* to this eminent mining engineer and prince of gentlemen, Mr. John Stuart Webster. Doctor Pacheco, will you be good enough to perform the operation?"

"This gentleman," said the doctor, laying his hand on Andrew's shoulder, "is Don Ricardo Luiz Ruey, a gentleman, a patriot, and the future president of our unhappy country."

Webster put his hands on the young man's shoulders. "Ricardo, my son," he asked earnestly, "do you think you could give me some little hint of the

approximate date on which you will assume office? By the nine gods of war, I never wanted a friend at court so badly as I want one to-night."

Doctor Pacheco, Colonel Caraveo, and Ricardo Ruey exchanged glances and laughed heartily. "I must introduce him to Captain Benavides and Lieutenant Arredondo," the Colonel said slyly.

"What!" Webster was amazed. "You know about it already?"

"Better than that, friend Webster. We knew about it before it happened. That is, we knew it was going to happen," Ricardo informed him.

Webster sat down and helped himself from a box of cigars he found on Ricardo's bureau. "I feel I am among friends at last," he announced between preliminary puffs; "so listen while I spin a strange tale. I've been the picture of bad luck ever since I started for this infernal—this wonderful country of yours. After leaving Denver for New Orleans, I came within a whisker of dying of ptomaine poisoning. Then in New Orleans I took a Sunday-morning stroll in Jackson Square and came across two men trying to knife another. In the interest of common decency I interfered and won a sweeping victory, but to my amazement the prospective corpse took to his heels and advised me to do the same——"

Ricardo Ruey sprang for John Stuart Webster. "By George," he said in English, "I'm going to hug you, too. I really ought to kiss you, because I'm that man you saved from assassination, but—too

long in the U. S. A., I suppose; I've lost the customs of my country."

"Get out," yelled Webster, fending him off. "Did you lose anything in that fracas?"

"Yes, a Malacca stick."

"I have it."

"Holy Moses! Jack—I'm going to call you Jack—why didn't you say something about this while we were on the steamer together?"

"Why, we played crib' and dominoes most of the way down, when I wasn't seasick, and we talked about other things. By the way, Ricardo—I'm going to call you Rick for short—do you happen to have any relatives in this country?"

"Yes, a number of second and third cousins. One lot bears the same family name."

"No relatives in the United States?"

"No."

"Coming down on the steamer, I didn't like to appear curious, but all the time I wanted to ask you one question."

"Ask it now."

"Are you a Sobrantean?"

"I was born in this country and raised here until I was fourteen."

"But you're—why, hang it, you're not a Latin?"

"No, I'm a mixture, with Latin predominating. My forbears were pure Castilians from Madrid, and crossed the Western Ocean in caravels. It's been a matter of pride with the house of Ruey to keep the breed pure, but despite all precautions, the family

tree has been grafted once with a Scotch thistle, twice with the lily of France, and once with the shamrock of Ireland. My mother was an Irishwoman."

"You alibi yourself perfectly, Ricardo, and my curiosity is appeased. Permit me to continue my tale," he added in Spanish; and forthwith he related with humorous detail his adventure at the gangplank of the steamer that had borne him and Ricardo Ruey south. Ricardo interrupted him. "We know all about that, friend Webster, and we knew the two delightful gentlemen had been told off to get you—unofficially."

"How did you find out?"

"A leak in the Intelligence Bureau, of which our friend Colonel Caraveo is an assistant chief."

"Explain," Webster demanded peremptorily. "Why all this intrigue extending to two countries and private individuals?"

"Certainly. The Sobrantean revolutionary junta has headquarters in New Orleans. It is composed of political exiles, for Sarros, the present dictator of Sobrante, rules with an iron hand, and has a cute little habit of railroading his enemies to the cemetery via the treason charge and the firing-squad. Quite a quaint fellow, Sarros! Robs the proletariat and spends it on the army with a lavish hand, and so in sheer gratitude they keep him in office. Besides, it's a sign of bad luck to oppose him at the regular elections. Well, he—he killed my father, who was the best president this benighted country ever had, and I

consider it my Christian duty to avenge my father and a patriotic duty to take up the task he left unfinished—the task of making over my country.

"In Sobrante, as in most of the countries in Central America, there are two distinct classes of people—the aristocrats and peons—and the aristocrat fattens on the peon, as he has had a habit of doing since Adam. We haven't any middle class to stand as a buffer between the two—which makes it a sad proposition. My father was an idealist and a dreamer and he dreamed of reform in government and a solution of the agrarian problem which confronts all Latin-America. Moreover, he trusted the common people—and one should not trust this generation of peons. We must have fifty years of education—free and compulsory—first.

"My father headed a revolution that was brief and practically bloodless, and the better to do the task he had set himself, he created a dictatorship with himself as dictator—this because he was shy on good cabinet and legislative material, the kind he could trust to play fair with the people."

Ricardo paused. "You are interested in all this, my friend?" he asked.

"It has an old, familiar sound, but crack along."

"My father, being human, erred. He trusted one Pablo Sarros, an educated peon, who had commanded the government forces under the régime my father overthrew. My tender-hearted parent discovered that Sarros was plotting to overthrow him; but instead of having him shot, he merely removed him

from command. Sarros gathered a handful of bandits, joined with the old government forces my father had conquered, hired a couple dozen Yankee artillerymen and—he won out. My father was captured and executed; the palace was burned, and my sister perished in the flames. I'm here to pay off the score."

"A worthy ambition! So you organized the revolutionary junta in New Orleans, eh?"

Ricardo nodded. "Word of it reached Sarros, and he sent his brother Raoul, chief of the Intelligence Bureau, to investigate and report. As fast as he reported, Colonel Caraveo reported to me. Sarros and his gang are just a little bit afraid of me, because he's about as popular with the people as a typhus epidemic, and strange to say, this curiously mercurial people have not forgotten the brief reign of his predecessor. My father's son possesses a name to conjure with. Consequently it was to the interest of the Sarros administration that I be eliminated. They watched every boat; hence my scheme for eluding their vigilance—which, thanks to you, worked like a charm."

"But," Webster complained, "I'm not sitting in the game at all, and yet I'm caught between the upper and nether millstones."

"That is easy to explain. You interfered that morning in Jackson Square; then Raoul Sarros met you going aboard the steamer for Buenaventura and you manhandled him; and naturally, putting two and two together, he has concluded that you are not only

his personal enemy but also a friend and protector of mine and consequently an enemy of the state."

"And as a consequence I'm marked for slaughter?"

"The first plan considered," said Colonel Caraveo, gravely, "was for Captain Benavides, who is an expert swordsman and a marvellous pistol-shot, to pick a quarrel with you."

"No hope, Colonel. I manhandled 'em both and declined to fight on their terms. I suppose now I'll just naturally be assassinated."

"It would be well, my friend," Doctor Pacheco suggested, "to return to the United States until after Ricardo and his friends have eliminated your Nemesis."

"How soon will that happy event transpire?"

"In about sixty days we hope to be ready to strike, Mr. Webster."

"We are recruiting our men secretly," Ricardo explained. "Our base is back in the hills beyond San Miguel de Padua. I'm going up there to-morrow."

"I was going up to San Miguel de Padua in a day or two myself, Rick, but I'll be hanged if I know what to do now. I'm beginning to worry—and that's a new experience with me."

Colonel Caraveo cleared his throat. "I understand from Ricardo that you and another American are interested in a mining concession, Mr. Webster."

Webster nodded.

"In this [illegible] a private landholder,

or did your friend secure it from the Sarros government?"

"From the government. We pay ten per cent. royalty, on a ninety-nine-year lease, and that's all I know about it. I have never seen the property, and my object in coming was to examine it and, if satisfied, finance the project."

"If you will return to your hotel, my dear sir," Colonel Caraveo suggested, "and remain there until noon to-morrow, I feel confident I can guarantee you immunity from attack thereafter. I have a plan to influence my associates in the Intelligence Office."

"Bully for you, Colonel. Give me sixty days in which to operate, and I'll have finished my job in Sobrante and gotten out of it before that gang of cutthroats wakes up to the fact that I'm gone. I thank you, sir."

"The least we can do, since you have saved Ricardo's life and rendered our cause a great service, is to save your life," Colonel Caraveo replied.

"This is more comfort than I had hoped for when I came here, gentlemen. I am very grateful, I assure you. Of course this little revolution you're cooking up is no affair of mine, and I trust I need not assure you that your confidence is quite safe with me."

The Doctor and the Colonel immediately rose and bowed like a pair of marionettes. Webster turned to Ricardo.

"Have you had any experience in revolutions, my son?" he asked.

Ricardo nodded. "I realized I had to have experience, and so I went to Mexico. I was with Madero through the first revolution."

"How are you arming your men?"

"Mannlichers. I've got five thousand of them. Cost me twelve dollars each. I've got twenty million rounds of cartridges, twenty-five machine-guns, and a dozen three-inch field-guns. I have also engaged two hundred American ex-soldiers to handle the machine-guns and the battery. These rascals cost me five dollars a day gold, but they're worth it; they like fighting and will go anywhere to get it—and are faithful."

"You are secretly mobilizing in the mountains, eh?" Webster rubbed his chin ruminatively. "Then I take it you'll attack Buenaventura when you strike the first blow?"

"Quite right. We must capture a seaport if we are to revolute successfully."

"I'm glad to know that. I'll make it my business to be up in the mountains at the time. I'm for peace, every rattle out of the box. Gentlemen, you've cheered me wonderfully. I will now go home and leave you to your evil machinations; and, the good Lord and the jiggers willing, I shall yet glean a night's sleep."

He shook hands all around and took his departure.

Mother Jenks was waiting for Webster at the foot of the stairs. He paused on the threshold.

"Mrs. Jenks," he said, "Billy tells me you have been very kind to him. I want to tell you how much

I appreciate it and that I stand willing to reciprocate any time you are in need."

Mother Jenks fingered her beard and reflected. "'Ave you met Miss Dolores Ruey, sir?" she queried.

"Your ward? Yes."

"'Ow does the lamb strike you, Mr. Webster?"

"I have never met many women; I have known few intimately; but I should say that Miss Dolores Ruey is the marvel of her sex. She is as beautiful as she is good, as good as she is intelligent, and as intelligent as she can be."

"She's a lydy, sir," Mother Jenks affirmed proudly. "An' I done it. You can see with arf a heye wot I am, but for all that, I've done my dooty by her. From the day my sainted 'Enery—'e was a colonel o' hartillery under President Ruey, Dolores's father—hescaped from the burnin' palace with 'er an' told me to raise 'er a lydy for the syke of her father, as was the finest gentleman this rotten country'll ever see, she's been my guidin' star. She's self-supportin' now, but still I ain't done my whole dooty by her. I want to see 'er married to a gentleman as'll maintain 'er like a lydy."

"Well, Mrs. Jenks, I think you will live to see that worthy ambition attained. Mr. Geary is head over heels in love with her."

"Aye. Willie's a nice lad—I could wish no better; but wot 'e's got 'e got from you, an' where'll 'e be if 'is mine doesn't p'y big? Now, with you, sir, it's different. You're a bit oldern' Billy, an' more settled an' serious; you've made yer fortune, so Willie tells

me, an', not to go beatin' about the bally bush, I s'y, wot's the matter with you an' her steppin' over the broomstick together? You might go a bloomin' sight farther an' fare wuss."

"Too old, my dear schemer, too old!" John Stuart replied smilingly. "And she's in love with Billy. Don't worry. If he doesn't make a go of this mining concession, I'll take care of his finances until he can do so himself. I do not mind telling you, in strictest confidence, that I have made my will and divided my money equally between them."

"Gord bless you, for a sweet, kind gentleman," Mother Jenks gulped, quite overcome with emotion.

Hastily Webster bade Mother Jenks good-night and hurried away to escape a discussion on such a delicate topic with Billy's blunt and single-minded landlady. His mind was in a tumult. So it was that he paid no attention to a vehicle that jogged by him with the *cochero* sagging low in his seat, half asleep over the reins, until a quick command from the closed interior brought the vehicle to an abrupt halt, half a block in advance of Webster.

Save for an arc-light at each end of the block, the Calle de Concordia was dim; save for Webster, the carriage and the two men who piled hurriedly out at the rear of the conveyance, the Calle de Concordia was devoid of life. Webster saw one of the men hurriedly toss a coin to the *cochero;* with a fervent "*Gracias, mi capitan,*" the driver clucked to his horse, turned the corner into the Calle Elizondo and disappeared, leaving his late passengers facing Webster

and calmly awaiting his approach. He was within twenty feet of them when the taller of the two men spoke.

"Good evening, my American friend. This meeting is a pleasure we scarcely hoped to have so soon. For the same we are indebted to Lieutenant Arredondo, who happened to look back as we passed you, and recognized you under the arc-light."

Webster halted abruptly; the two Sobrantean officers stood smiling and evidently enjoying his discomfort. Each carried a service revolver in a closed holster fastened to his sword-belt, but neither had as yet made a move to draw—seeing which, Webster felt sufficiently reassured to accept the unwelcome situation with a grace equal to that of his enemies.

"What? You two bad little boys up this late! I'm surprised," he replied in Spanish. He folded his arms, struck an attitude and surveyed them as might an indignant father. "You kids have been up to some mischief," he added, as his right hand closed over the butt of his automatic, where it lay snuggled in the open bolster under his left arm between his shirt and coat. "Can it be possible you are going to take advantage of superior numbers and the fact that you are both armed, to force me into a duel on your terms, my dear Captain Benavides?"

By a deferential bow, the unwholesome Benavides indicated that such were his intentions. "Then," said Webster, "as the challenged party I have the choice of weapons. I choose pistols."

"At what range?" the Lieutenant asked with mock interest.

"As we stand at present. I'm armed. Pull your hardware, you pretty pair of polecats, and see if you can beat me to the draw."

Captain Benavides's jaw dropped slightly; with a quiet, deliberate motion his hand stole to his holster-flap. Lieutenant Arredondo wet his lips and glanced so apprehensively at his companion that Webster was aware that here was a situation not to his liking.

"You should use an open holster," Webster taunted. "Come, come—unbutton that holster-flap and get busy."

Benavides's hand came away from the holster. He was not the least bit frightened, but his sense of proportion in matters of this kind was undergoing a shake-up.

"In disposing of any enemy in a gun fight, so a professional killer once informed me," Webster continued, "it is a good plan to put your first bullet anywhere in the abdomen; the shock of a bullet there paralyzes your opponent for a few seconds and prevents him from returning the compliment, and in the interim you blow his brains out while he lies looking at you. I have never had any practical experience in matters of this kind, but I don't mind telling you that if I *must* practise on somebody, the good Lord could not have provided two more delightful subjects."

He ceased speaking, and for nearly half a minute the three men appraised each other. Benavides was

smiling slightly; Arredondo was fidgeting; Webster's glance never faltered from the Captain's nervous hand.

"You would be very foolish to draw," Webster then assured Benavides. "If I am forced to kill you, it will be with profound regret. Suppose you two dear, sweet children run along home and think this thing over. You may change your mind by to-morrow morn——"

The Captain's hand, with the speed of a juggler's, had flown to his holster; but quick as he was, Webster was a split-second quicker. The sound of his shot roared through the silent *calle*, and Benavides, with his pistol half drawn, lifted a bloody, shattered hand from the butt as Webster's automatic swept in a swift arc and covered Arredondo, whose arms on the instant went skyward.

"That wasn't a half-bad duel," Webster remarked coldly. "Are you not obliged to me, Captain, for not blowing your brains out—for disregarding my finer instincts and refraining from shooting you first through the abdomen? Bless you, my boy, I've been stuck for years in places where the only sport consisted in seeing who could take a revolver, shoot at a tin can and roll it farthest in three seconds. Let me see your hand."

Benavides sullenly held up that dripping member, and Webster inspected it at a respectful distance. "Steel-jacket bullet," he informed the wounded man. "Small hole—didn't do much damage. You'll be just as well as ever in a month."

He helped himself to Arredondo's gun, flipped out the cylinder, and slipped all six cartridges into his palm. Similarly he disarmed Benavides, expressed his regret that circumstances had rendered it imperative to use force, and strolled blithely down the *calle*. In the darkened *patio* he groped along the wall until he found the swinging rope by which he had descended from his room—whereupon he removed his shoes, tied the laces together, slung them around his neck, dug his toes into the adobe wall and climbed briskly to his room.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

THE next morning Webster waited until Dolores appeared and then accompanied her into the dining room for breakfast.

"Well, how did you pass your first night in Buenaventura?" she inquired, in the manufacture of breakfast conversation.

"Not very well. Jiggers bit me and woke me up, and finally I fell into a trance and had a vision—about you. After that I couldn't get to sleep again. I was fairly bursting to see you at breakfast and read your palm. I've just discovered a wonderful system."

"Show me," she flashed back at him, and she extended her little hand. He picked it up gravely and with the dull tine of a fork made a great show of tracing the lines on her palm.

"You are about twenty-four years old, and your ancestors were pure-bred Castilians who came from Madrid, crossing the Atlantic in caravels. Ever since the first Ruey landed on this coast the family has been identified with the government of the country in one way or another. Also, Scotch, French, and Irish blood has been infused into the tribe; your mother was an Irish woman. When you were quite a little girl, your father, Don Ricardo Ruey, at that time president of Sobrante, failed to suppress a

revolution and was cornered in the government palace, which was set afire.

"Through the bravery and devotion of a cockney gentleman, Colonel Henry Jenks, an artillery officer in your father's army, you were saved from perishing in the burning palace. Colonel Jenks turned you over to his spouse, now known as Mother Jenks, with instructions to raise you a lydy, and Mother Jenks has carried out those instructions. Colonel Jenks and your father were executed, and Mother Jenks sent you to the United States to be educated. You had a brother, Ricardo Luis Ruey, older than yourself by seven or eight years, I should judge. In some mysterious manner you and your brother lost track of each other, and at the present moment he believes you perished in the flames that gutted the government palace.

"You are of a proud, independent nature; you work at something for a living, and inasmuch as you haven't been able to set aside a great deal of money from your earnings, you are planning to terminate your visit to your native land at an early date and return to the United States for the purpose of getting back to work. These plans, however, will never be consummated.

"Why? Because you are to be married to a nice man and live happily ever afterward; and about sixty days from now, if all goes well, I, John S. Webster, am going to introduce you to your long-lost brother Ricardo. You will first see Ricardo riding at the head of his victorious rebel troops as he enters Buena-

ventura. He will be the next president of this wretched country, if, fortunately, he is not killed in the revolution he is now fomenting against his father's ancient enemy. Your brother does not know you are living, and it will be a proud and happy day for me when I bring him to you. In the interim, what do you purpose having for breakfast? Ham and eggs sunny side up, an omelette or a cereal?"

He released her hand and favoured her with the boyish grin that always had the effect of stripping the years from him as one strips the husk from a ripe ear of corn. She was gazing at him in wide-eyed amazement.

"Oh, don't doubt me," he pleaded. "It will all come out just as I have told you. Of course, I don't go in for telling fortunes very often; I'm a slow old horse to start, but once I sneak into the collar, something has to give."

"Is my brother really alive?"

"He was as late as midnight last night. Do you recall the chap I saved from being assassinated in New Orleans?"

"Yes."

"Your worthy brother. And do you recall the chauffeur whose passage to this port I was forced to pay?"

"Yes."

"The same individual. I sent him ashore in the launch with Billy, and he has been housed at El Buen Amigo, but left early this morning for the back-country to open a recruiting office."

"And you have known this all along and wouldn't tell me?" she reproved him.

"Didn't discover it until after I had left him last night; then I put two and two together and made four."

"Oh, I can hardly believe it."

"I never lie."

"Never?"

"I mean on serious matters. And you needn't cry about it, Miss Ruey. I do not purpose being the bearer of welcome news and having my breakfast ruined for my reward."

She reached across the little table and squeezed his big brown hand impulsively. "You're the most wonderful man I ever knew. And does my poor brother know I am living, Mr. Webster?"

"No—and I'm not going to tell him. I think it will be much nicer to restore you to each other on the steps of the government palace on the day when the Ruey faction comes into its own again. That will make his victory all the sweeter. I am the innocent bystander who started this little drama, and by jingo, I want to finish it. Why, it has been years and years since I've had any real sport."

"You're so kind!"

"Not at all. My discovery of your brother was as accidental as falling downstairs." And he related to her his interview with Ricardo, whose statements, when compared with the information gleaned from Mother Jenks, had proved so illuminating. "By the way," he continued, "where was

Ricardo when your father's ship of state went on the rocks?"

"At school in a military academy in Kentucky. At least, so I was informed by my cousins here shortly after my arrival, and prior to losing caste with them because of my association, unchaperoned, with Billy."

"It is a marvellous mix-up, which Ricardo can doubtless explain, Miss Ruey. I know he believes his sister perished with her father; Mother Jenks didn't know where he was and couldn't communicate with him—and there you are. However, little old Jack Fix-it will bring you together again in due course. In the interim, how about those eggs? Straight up—or flip 'em?"

She beamed across at him. "We are going to be such good, true friends, aren't we?" she urged. He almost shivered, but managed a hypocritical nod. "While we have only known each other twenty-four hours, it seems a great deal longer than that—probably because Billy has told me so much about you, and you're—so comfortable and easy to get acquainted with, and I—I can't very well express my gratitude for what you've done—for what you're going to do." Her voice faltered; she smiled roguishly through the tears of her emotion. "If I were only Billy, now, I could put my arm across your shoulders and settle the matter by saying: 'Johnny, you old horsethief, you're all right.'"

"The best thing to do would be to cease puffing me up with importance. And now, before we climb

out of the realm of romance and the improbable to the more substantial plane of things for breakfast, just one brief word of caution. Now that I have told you your brother lives and is in Buenaventura, forget it until I mention it again, because his presence here is his secret, not ours."

"All right, Caliph," she agreed. "I think I shall call you that hereafter. Like the late Caliph Haroun Al Raschid, it appears you have a habit of prowling around o' nights in queer places, doing good deeds for your subjects. But tell me about my brother. Describe him to me."

"Not now. Here comes the head waiter with a cablegram for me, I think."

That functionary came to their table and handed one of the familiar yellow envelopes to each of them.

"We'll excuse each other," Dolores suggested. She read:

Go you if I lose. You are a good, game little scout, and I like you fine.

JEROME.

She glanced across at Webster, whose face was a conflicting study of emotions in which disappointment and amazement appeared to predominate. "You ancient scoundrel," she heard him murmur.

"What ho, Caliph! Unpleasant news?" she ventured.

"Yes—and no. I had one of the finest jobs in the world all staked out—and now the boss cables me it's filled—by a better man."

"What are you going to do about it?"

"Well—as soon as I've had my breakfast, I'm going to cable Neddy Jerome and tell him I'm satisfied—satisfied to stay here and satisfied he's a liar. You see, Miss Ruey, he objected vigorously to my coming here in the first place—wanted me to take a thirty-day vacation and then manage the Colorado Consolidated Mines Company, Limited, for him. I like Neddy and would have been glad to go to work for his company, but of course Billy comes first, and so I declined the offer. Later I changed my mind, and last night I cabled him I'd accept if he'd wait sixty days—possibly ninety; and now he replies that he's sorry, but the job is filled by a better man. That's why I know he's a liar."

"I see. You figure there isn't a better mining engineer than you—eh, Caliph?"

He looked at her reproachfully. "No, but Neddy Jerome does, and I know he does because he has taken the trouble to tell me so more than once. And as a rule Neddy inclines toward the truth. However, it's just as well——" He paused, staring hard at her. "By the way, you foretold this! Why, this is amazing."

She could now have wept with laughter. "Well" —soberly—"I told you some other things equally amazing, did I not?"

"Yes, you told me other things more or less interesting, but you *fore*told this. How do you account for that?"

"The witness declines to answer, on the ground

that she may incriminate herself and be burned for a witch."

"Remarkable woman!"

"You were about to remark that it is just as well——"

"That Neddy's reconciled to losing me, because since cabling him yesterday evening I've changed my mind again. I'm going to stay here now."

"Indeed! Why?"

"Just to be obstinate. Apparently I'm not wanted here by the powers that be; so just to rile them I'm going to hang around Sobrante the way Grant hung around Richmond and argue the question with them. By the way, I see you received a cablegram also. Better news than mine, I hope."

She nodded. "I have a little business deal on back home. Haven't got a great deal invested, but it looks as if I might make ten thousand dollars."

He arched his eyebrows and favoured her with a little disapproving grunt. Sounded like the prospectus of a fake mining promoter—yes, by thunder, that was it. Dolores was a school teacher, and school teachers and doctors are ever the mainstay of a swindler's sucker list.

"You won ten dollars from me yesterday," he challenged. "Bet you another ten I can tell you the nature of your investment."

"Go you, if I lose!" Unconsciously she was learning the argot of the male of the species, as exemplified in Neddy Jerome's cablegram.

"It's a mining property."

"You win. It is," she answered truthfully, starting to open her purse.

"Quartz or placer?"

"I don't know. Explain."

He chuckled at her ignorance. "Quartz is gold-bearing rock, and placer is gold-bearing gravel."

"Then my mining property is placer, because it has lots of sand."

"I knew it, I knew it," he warned her solemnly, and he shook an admonitory finger at her. "Black sand, eh? Is the gold very fine?"

"I think it is."

"Then you're stung good and deep—so don't delude yourself into thinking you have ten thousand dollars coming. I never knew a proposition for saving the fine gold in black sand that didn't turn out to be a fizzle. It's the hardest thing in the world to save. Now, listen: You tell me the name of the flim-flam artist that got you into this deal, and when I get back to the United States I'll investigate the company; if it's an out-and-out swindle, I'll take that promoter by the throat and choke your money out of him, the scoundrel! It is just these fly-by-night fellows that ruin the finest gambling game in the world and scare off investors in legitimate mining propositions."

"Oh, you mustn't—really, Caliph. He's an old man, and I only did it to help him out."

"There should be no sentiment in business, Miss Ruey."

"Oh, well, let's be cheerful and hopeful, Caliph,

and discuss a more important subject." She was very serious now, for by her meddling she had, she realized, so arranged matters that at a time when John Stuart Webster's very life depended upon his immediate departure from Buenaventura, he was planning to stay and face the music, just to be obstinate. "You must reconsider your latest decision to remain in this country," she insisted. "Your life may be the price of liberty of action, you know."

"'Give me liberty or give me death,'" quoted Webster.

"But isn't Billy capable of developing the mine after you advance the cash?"

"I wouldn't advance him a cent for his mine until I had investigated it myself."

"Then you should make some arrangements to safeguard yourself while making the investigation, and leave Sobrante immediately thereafter. Isn't that a sensible proposition?"

"Very—if I felt like leaving Sobrante. But I do not. If that mining concession is a potential winner, I'll have to stick around and make a winner out of it before I go away and leave Bill in charge. Besides, I'm worried about Bill. He's full of malarial fever, and last night I got thinking about him and decided to send him back to the Colorado mountains for a few months. This country is going to be in the throes of a revolution; the chances are we will not be able to do much with our property until the war is over, and I will be able to do that little. I want

some regular doctors to work on Bill so he'll be fit when he gets back on the job."

As a matter of fact, this idea of sending Billy to the United States had but that moment occurred to Jack Webster; he reflected now that this plan was little short of an inspiration. It would give Billy and Dolores an opportunity to marry and have a honeymoon; it would leave him free of her disturbing presence, and enable him to leave Sobrante when the Gearys should return. He resolved to speak to Billy about it.

Dolores's voice broke in upon his cunning reflections. "But Billy tells me you already have a fortune sufficient for the needs of a caliph without a court. Why risk your precious life to acquire more? Money isn't everything in life."

"No, but the game is."

"What game? Mining?"

"The game of life."

"But this is the game of death."

"Which makes life all the sweeter if I can beat the game. Perhaps I can better illustrate my point of view with a story. Some years ago I was sent to Arizona to examine a mining property and report upon it; if I advised its purchase, my principals were prepared to buy at my valuation. Well, when I arrived, I found a miserable shanty close to a shaft and dump, and in the shanty I found a weather-beaten couple. The woman was probably forty but looked fifty. The man had never been anything but a hard-rock miner—four dollars a day had been

the limit of his earnings in any one day until he stumbled on some float, traced it up, and located the claims I was there to examine and try to buy.

"His wife had been a miner's daughter, knowing nothing but drudgery and poverty and continuing that existence after marriage. For twenty years she had been darning her husband's socks, washing his clothes, and cooking his meals. Even after they uncovered the ledge, it wasn't worth any more than the country rock to them unless they could sell it, because the man had neither the money nor the ability to develop it himself. He even lacked the ability to sell it, because it requires real ability to unload any kind of a mine for a million dollars, and real nerve on the part of the man who buys. I examined the mine, decided it was cheap at a million dollars, and so reported to my principals. They wired me to close, and so I took a sixty-day option in order to verify the title.

"Well, time passed, and one bright day I rode up to that shanty with a deed and a certified check for a million dollars in my pocket; whereupon I discovered the woman had had a change of heart and bucked over the traces. No, siree! She would not sign thet there deed—and inasmuch as the claim was community property, her signature was vitally necessary. She asked me so many questions, however, as to the size of the stamp mill we would install and how many miners would be employed on the job, that finally I saw the light and tried a shot in the dark. "My dear Mrs. Skaggs," I said, "if you'll sign this

deed and save us all a lot of litigation over this option you and your husband have given me, I'll do something handsome. I will—on my word of honour—I'll give you the exclusive boarding-house privilege at this mine."

"And what did she say, Caliph?"

"She said: 'Give me the pen, Mr. Webster, and please excuse my handwriting; I'm that nervous in business matters.'"

Dolores's silvery laughter rippled through the room. "But I don't see the point," she protested.

"We will come to it presently. I was merely explaining one person's point of view. You would not, of course, expect me to have the same point of view as Mrs. Skaggs, of Arizona."

"Certainly not."

"All right! Listen to this! In 1907, at the height of the boom times in Goldfield, Nevada, I was worth a million dollars. On the first day of October I could have cashed in my mining stocks for a million—and I had a lot of cash in bank, too. But I'd always worked so hard and been poor so long that my wealth didn't mean anything to me. I wanted the exclusive privilege of more slavery, and so I staked a copper prospect, which later I discovered to consist of uncounted acres of country rock and about twenty-five dollars' worth of copper stain. In order to save a hundred dollars I did my own assessment work, drove a pick into my foot, developed blood-poison, went to the hospital, and was nice and helpless when the panic came along the middle of the month. The bank went

bust, and my ready cash went with it; I couldn't give my mining stocks away. Everybody knew I was a pauper—everybody but the doctor. He persisted in regarding me as a millionaire and sent me a bill for five thousand dollars."

"How perfectly outrageous! Why, Caliph, I would have let him sue me."

"I would have, too—but I didn't. I induced him to settle for one hundred thousand shares of stock in my copper prospect. The par value was a dollar a share, and I was going to sell a block at ten cents, but in view of his high professional standing I let him have it for a nickel a share. I imagine he still has it. I bought back later all the other stock I sold, because the property was worthless, and in order to be a sport I offered him five hundred dollars for his block, but he thought I was trying to swindle him and asked five thousand."

"Oh, Caliph!"

"Wonderful game, isn't it—this game of life. So sweet when a fellow's taking chances! Now that I am fairly prosperous again, the only thing in life that really matters is the uncertainty as to whether, when finally I do leave Sobrante, I shall ride to the steamship landing in a hack or a hearse."

"But you could go in a hack this morning and avoid that uncertainty."

"The millionaire drudge I told you of could have gone to live in a pretty villa on the Riviera, but she chose a miner's boarding-house."

"Then why," she persisted, "did you leave the

United States with the firm intention of remaining in Sobrante indefinitely, change your mind before you were here eight hours, and cable this Neddy Jerome person you would return in sixty or ninety days—and the following morning decide to remain, after all!"

"My dear young lady, if I changed my clothes as often as I change my mind, the what-you-may-call-'em chaps that manufacture Society Brand clothes couldn't keep me dressed."

"But why?"

"That," he answered gravely, "is a secret."

"Women delight to pry into men's secrets."

"I know it. Had a friend once—married. Every night after dinner he used to sit and stare into the fire and his wife used to ask him what he was thinking about. He would look up at her owlishly and tell her it was something he couldn't explain to her, because she'd never understand it—and that was all he would tell her, although right frequently, I dare say, he felt like telling her something she could understand! She brooded over his secret until she couldn't stand it any more, and one day she packed her duds and flew home to mother. He let her stay there three months, and finally one day he sent her a blueprint of what he'd been thinking about."

"What was it?"

"An internal-combustion engine. You see, until she left him, he'd never been able to get set to figure out something in connection with the inlet valves——"

"Stop right there, Caliph. I'm rebuked. I'll let you get set to think——"

"I didn't mean that. You let me get set yesterday—and I figured it all out then—and last night—and a minute ago. I don't care to do any more thinking to-day. Please talk to me."

"And you refuse to tell me why you cabled your friend Jerome?"

"You will never know. I told you it's a secret."

"Bet you I find out."

"How much? That ten thousand dollars you expect to make from the flour-gold in your black-sand claim? And by the way, ten dollars, please. I won it for guessing you were interested in a mining proposition."

She returned to him the bill she had won from him the day before. "Ten thousand dollars suits me. Of course I haven't got the money just now, and this is what Billy calls a finger-bet, but if I lose, I guarantee to pay. Are we betting even money? I think that is scarcely fair. Under the circumstances I should be entitled to odds."

"Nothing doing! No odds on a bet of this nature to a seeress who has already jarred me from soul to vermiform appendix by making good! You know too blamed much already, and how you discovered it is a problem that may drive me crazy yet."

After breakfast they repaired to the veranda to await the result of Webster's experiment with Don Juan Cafetéro. Sure enough, the wreck had again

returned; he was seated on the edge of the veranda waiting for them; as they approached, he held up a grimy, quivering hand, in the palm of which lay—a five-dollar gold-piece.

"What?" Mr. Webster said, amazed. "Still unchanged!"

"I thried to change it at half a dozen *cantinas*," Don Juan wheezed, "but divil a bit av systim did any av thim have. Wan offered this in spiggoty money an' the other offered that, an' sure if I'd taken the best that was offered me in exchange, ye might have t'ought I'd tuk more nor wan dhrink."

"Bravo! Three long, loud, raucous cheers for Don Juan Cafetéro!" Dolores cried. "That's just exactly what he expected you to do, Don Juan."

"Give a dog a bad name, an' 'twill shtick to him," the derelict replied resignedly.

"Was it a terrible task to come back without a drink, Don Juan?"

He shivered. "A shky-blue kangaroo wit' a pink tail an' green ears chased me into this *patio*, ma'am."

"You're very brave, Cafferty. How does it feel to win back your self-respect?" Webster asked him.

"Beggin' the young leddy's pardon—it feels like hell, sor."

"Caliph, don't be cruel," Dolores pleaded. "Call a waiter and give Don Juan what you promised him."

So Webster went into the hotel bar and returned presently with a bottle of brandy and a glass, which he filled and held out toward Don Juan. "One of

the paradoxes of existence, Don Juan," he observed, "lies in the fact that so many of the things in life that are good for us are bad for us. This jolt will disperse the menagerie and quiet your nerves, but nevertheless it is a nail in your coffin."

Don Juan proved himself a true Hibernian soldier of misfortune by jesting under fire. "Whilst ye have the hammer in yer hand, sor, dhrive in another," he pleaded. Webster declined, however, and returned the bottle to the bar, where he had it marked for Don Juan and set aside, for it was his opinion, evolved from a vast experience with hard-drinking miners, that the only cure for poor, diseased Don Juan lay in a judicious application of hair from the dog that had bitten him.

"And this is another reason why I must stay here longer than I intended," he said softly to Dolores, indicating Don Juan with his thumb. "He's just about ready to be poured back into the bottle, and I'm going to see if I cannot restore him to his original solid state. Experiments in chemistry always did fascinate me."

He bade her adieu, and accompanied by his protégé, strolled uptown on a shopping tour. Here he outfitted Don Juan neatly but not gaudily and added to his own personal effects two high-power sporting rifles, three large-calibre automatic pistols, and a plentiful supply of ammunition—after which he returned to the hotel, first having conducted Don Juan to a barber shop and given him instructions to report for orders and his midday drink the instant he should

have acquired the outward evidences of respectability.

At the hotel Webster found two messages awaiting him. One was from Billy Geary, up at San Miguel de Padua, advising him that everything was in readiness for a trip to the mine; the other was a note from Ricardo Ruey, but signed with his alias of Andrew Bowers. Webster read:

My Dear Friend:

Permit me to congratulate you on your marksmanship last night and to commend your forbearance in winging a gent where killing was not only justified but to be encouraged. You have, so I am authoritatively informed, completely buffaloed your two gentlemen. They cannot, in our own classical English, "quite make you."

However, this letter is not all gossip. A certain higher-up has at length been convinced that it would be extremely inadvisable to eliminate you now. It has been pointed out to this person that you are a prom. cit. up in your neck of the woods and dangerous to monkey with—personally and because such monkeying may lead to unpleasant complications with your paternal government. A far more artistic and effective way of raising hell with you has been suggested to this higher-up individual, and he has accepted it. Indeed, the plan pleased him so much that he laughed quite heartily. Really, it is quite diabolical, but remember, he who laughs last laughs best—and I'm the villain in this sketch.

Barring accidents, my dear Webster, you are good for at least six weeks of existence. Beyond that I dare not guarantee you.

Thine,
Andrew Bowers.

"That makes it nice," the recipient of this comforting communication soliloquized. He went up to his room, packed a duffle-bag with such belongings as he would find necessary during a prolonged stay in the mountains, and at luncheon was fortunate enough to find Dolores in the dining room when he entered. Again she motioned him to the vacant chair opposite to her.

"I'm going up to San Miguel de Padua this afternoon," he announced as he took his seat. A look of extreme anxiety clouded her lovely face, and he noticed it. "Oh, there's no risk," he hastened to assure her. "That scamp of a brother of yours, through his friends in high places, has managed to get me a reprieve." He handed her Ricardo's letter.

She looked up, much relieved, from her perusal. "And how long do you expect to be gone, Caliph?"

"Quite a while. I'll be busy around that dratted concession for a couple of weeks, surveying and assaying and what-all; then, while waiting for our machinery and supplies to arrive from the United States, I shall devote my spare time to hunting and fishing and reforming Don Juan Cafetéro. The cool hills for mine."

"What a selfish, unsociable programme!" she reflected. "I wonder if it will occur to him to come down here once in a while and take me for a drive on the Malecon and talk to me to keep me from dying of ennui before I meet Ricardo. I'll wait and see if he suggests it."

However, for reasons best known to himself and

the reader, Mr. Webster made no such interesting suggestion; so she decided that while he was tremendously nice, he was, nevertheless, a very queer man and thoroughly exasperating.

Before leaving that day Webster turned over to her a steamer-trunk filled with books, and with something of the feeling of a burglar about to rob a bank, asked her if she would care to ride down to the station with him. "Sort of speeding the parting guest, you know," he explained comfortably, for somehow, at that moment, he felt a trifle untrue to Billy Geary. Of course, Dolores, having nothing more pleasurable or exciting to do, would—and did. At the station they found Don Juan waiting in charge of the baggage.

Just before the train pulled out John Stuart Webster took Dolores's hand. "Good-bye, Seeress," he said very soberly. "The trail forks here for the first time—possibly the last, although I'll try to be on hand to make good on my promise to present you to your brother the day he occupies the palace. However, if I shouldn't be in town that day, just go up and introduce yourself to him. It's been wonderful to have met you and known you, even for such a brief period. I shall never forget you and the remarkable twenty-four hours just passed."

"I shall not soon forget them myself, Caliph—nor you," she added. "Haven't you been a busy little cup of tea, Caliph! Within twenty-four hours after landing, you have changed your mind three times, lost the best job in the world, had your fortune told,

been marked for slaughter, acquired a new-found friend and commenced actively and with extraordinarily good results the work of reforming him, soused a gentleman in the fountain, spurned another with the tip of your boot, rode with me around the Malecon and listened to the band concert, bundled poor Billy off to San Miguel de Padua, received a challenge to fight a duel, accepted it, had it rejected, engaged in a street fight and shot a man through the hand, discovered my brother presumed to be dead, and received a reprieve from your enemies, while they perfect new plans for destroying you. Really, you are quite a caliph."

"Oh, there's a dash of speed in the old horse yet, Miss Ruey," he assured her laughingly. "Now listen: don't tell anybody about your brother, and don't tell Billy about my adventures since he left for San Miguel de Padua."

"But I'm not liable to see Billy——"

"Yes, you are—extremely liable. I'm going to send him back to you as soon as I can spare him, because I know you'll be lonesome and bored to death in this lonesome town, and Bill is bully good company. And I don't want you to tell him about the mess I'm in, because it would only worry him; he can't aid me, and the knowledge that I was in any danger, real or fancied, would be sufficient to cause him to rebel against my plans for his honeym—for his vacation. He'd insist on sticking around to protect me." He looked down at her little hand where it rested in his, so big and brown and hard;

with his free hand be patted her hand paternally. "Good-bye, Seeress," he said again; and turning to the steps, he leaped aboard just as the train started to move out of the station.

"Go—good-bye—Caliph," she called mournfully. Then to herself: "Bless his heart, he did remember I'd be terribly lonely, after all. He isn't a bit queer, but oh, dear, he is *so* exasperating. I could bump his kind old head against a wall!" She turned her back on the train, fearful that from where he clung on the steps he could, even at that distance, see the sudden rush of tears that blinded her. However, Don Juan Cafetéro, with his rubicund nose to the window of the last coach, did see them—saw her grope toward the carriage waiting to take her back to the hotel.

"Why, shure, the poor darlint's cryin'," he reflected. "Be the Great Gun an Athlone! Shure I t'ought all along 'twas Billy Geary she had her eye on—God love him! An' be the same token, didn't she tell me I was to shtay sober an' take care av Misther Webster? Hah-hah-a-a-a! Well! I'll say nothin' an' I'll be neuthral, but—but—*but*——"

From which it may be inferred that romance was not yet burned out of Don Juan's Gaelic soul. He would be "neuthral," but—but—*but*—he reserved the right to butt in!

CHAPTER TWENTY

THROUGHOUT the slow, tortuous journey, while the train crept up and ever upward into the hills, Don Juan entertained his patron with alternate snatches of the song closest to his heart (or rather his stomach)—"The Cruiskeen Lawn," which, liberally translated for the benefit of those not familiar with the Gaelic, means "the morning's morning." Between verses the outcast suggested the advisability of a drink to ward off approaching faintness or discoursed most learnedly on the roadbed, which was a tribute to his efficiency as a section-boss in his other incarnation.

Arrived at San Miguel de Padua about midnight, Webster found the climate temperate, in fact, decidedly cool. Billy was waiting for them and was properly amazed, but not scandalized when Don Juan Cafetéro, abusing the station hands in a horrible hodgepodge of English and Spanish, superintended the landing of the baggage on the platform.

"I had to bring him with me," Webster explained. "I'm going to wean him, and after that baby quits crying for his bottle, believe me, Bill, we'll have the prince of a foreman for our mine. Quite a character, is Don Juan, when you dig down into him."

"Dig far enough into that ruin and you'll find fire-

crackers," Billy admitted. "However, John, I'm afraid he won't explode. The powder's damp. How did you leave Dolores?"

"Fit as a fiddle, Bill."

"How does she stack up on better acquaintance, Johnny?"

"She's a skookum lass. She sent her love and I promised to send you back to her P. D. Q. So don't bother me with talk about her. If you think you're going to sit by my bed half the night and talk about your heart's desire, you've another guess coming. You'll see her again in a week or ten days, I hope."

"No? Is that so, Johnny? Bully for you, you old wampus cat. Tell Don Juan to steer you over to the Globo de Oro. He knows the place. I've got to go and hire a mule or some other quadruped for Don Juan if we're to avoid a late start in the morning. Good-night, old fellow."

They were up at daybreak, and with three heavily laden pack-mules in charge of two semi-naked *mozos*, while the cook jogged comfortably along on his big splay feet in the rear, they set out for Billy's concession. From San Miguel de Padua they turned west on a splendid highway paved with limestone blocks and winding up into the hills on an easy gradient.

"Government built, this, I dare say," Webster suggested as they trotted along side by side.

Billy nodded. "It is the only evidence I have observed of an inclination on the part of President

Sarros to give the lowly peon a run for his taxes. This highway stretches from San Miguel de Padua to the western national boundary; I imagine Sarros built it with some idea of enabling him to get there first with the most guns in the event of war with his neighbours on the Pacific side. Quite a rare plucked 'un, is Sarros—to quote Mother Jenks."

"Are you acquainted with him, Bill? What kind of a bird is he?"

"Oh, yes, indeed, I know him. We're great *amigos*. I'm the man that taught him the folly of betting too heavily on two pair after the draw. He has Indian blood in him—quite a little of it, in fact; but he is well educated. Speaks French, Spanish, and English very fluently. He's a short man and wears high-heeled boots to make himself look taller than he really is. He is crafty, suspicious, sensitive, and possessed of a sense of humour—only his humour is tinged with cruelty. He'd steal a cross off a grave and kill his best friend as quickly, should political expediency demand it, as you or I would kill a rattlesnake. He has a rattling good intelligence-department, pays liberally for information, and keeps down rebellion by the simple process of locating the ringleaders and shooting them. He bumped off old General Morelos some six weeks ago—did it on mere suspicion, too."

"You must have come to Sobrante mighty well recommended to get into the good graces of the scoundrel."

"Not at all! Sarros is a peculiar man. It pleases

him to pose as a democrat and mingle freely with the proletariat—accompanied, however, by a strong bodyguard. Frequently he visits the cafés in Buenaventura and fraternizes with all and sundry. I met him first in a joint known as The Frenchman's, where he used to come to watch the drawing for the lottery. I was there matching another American for half-dollars, and Sarros edged up, all interest, and horned in on the game. Before the session was over we'd swapped cards, and the instant he learned I was a mining man and down here to give Sobrante the once-over, he invited me up to the palace for dinner. Our acquaintance quickly ripened into friendship—on his part. It seems he likes to have enterprising Americans come to Sobrante and exploit the country, because experience has demonstrated that if the visitors develop a good thing, there is always a rake-off in it for Sarros."

Webster nodded. "Same old game anywhere you go south of the Rio Grande," he replied.

"I had a couple of thousand dollars I'd saved on a job I had down in Rhodesia, so I was enabled to put up a big front. I received government permission to prospect government lands, and——"

"Do you pay a royalty to the government, Bill?"

"Five per cent."

"How about the president's rake-off?"

"Oh, that's unofficial, of course, but it's understood we pay him 5 per cent. of our output."

"Anybody else to take care of?"

"No, that cleans up the gang. Loaiza, the Minis-

ter of the Interior, wanted in, but I kicked like a bay steer and Sarros shooed him off."

"A fine lot of bandits to do business with!" Webster declared disgustedly. "Still, it's their way of doing business, and much as we dislike that kind of business, we'll have to do it that way or not at all. The government ought to get 10 per cent. of our gross output, and Sarros ought to be shot. However, I dare say we can stand for the blackmail if, as you say, you have twelve-dollar ore."

"Wait and assay it yourself," Billy assured him.

For thirty miles they followed the government highway, and then debouched to the southwest along a neglected road just wide enough to accommodate the clumsy oxcarts of the peons. The country was sparsely settled and evidently given over to stock-raising. By degrees the road lost itself in the tall, dry grass, and became a faint trail which led into a forest of fir and other woods, with a good deal of mahogany and with very little underbrush. Billy rode in front, following through the timber a trail of his own blazing; and on the afternoon of the third day they dropped swiftly into a bare brown valley lying between timbered hills, displaying here and there the red stain of oxide of iron, from which evidence Webster knew he was in a mineral country. Billy pointed to a yellow mound at the base of one of the toes of the range flanking the valley on the south.

"There's the claim," he announced. "You can see the dump from here."

A ribbon of green ran down a cañon from the south

out into the brown, parched valley, where it suddenly disappeared.

"Sink," Billy elucidated, following the direction of his friend's gaze and divining his thoughts. "That creek lies entirely on our concession—about thirty miner's inches of water, I should judge. It disappears in the sands out there at the end of the green streak, but the irrigation along its banks has been sufficient to insure plenty of good feed for our stock."

Darkness had descended on the valley by the time they had pitched camp and eaten supper. They were up at dawn the following morning, however, and immediately after breakfast Jack Webster went to his duffle-bag and brought forth a dozen little canvas sacks and a prospector's hammer. "Now then, William, my son," he announced, "light the lantern and we'll see if you've forgotten all I taught you about mining."

They clambered up the dump to a point where two light steel rails projected over the edge. On top of the dump, lying beside the rails, were two small, rusty, steel ore cars; the rails led from the edge of the dump to the mouth of a tunnel in the hillside and disappeared therein.

Webster stood a moment, looking round him. "How did you happen to locate this ledge?" he demanded. "Was it grass-root stuff, with an outcropping here at the foot of the hill? No, of course it wasn't. You haven't enough ore on the dump. What the devil were you driving at?"

"Only a small portion of that dump is mine, Jack,

and I didn't locate the ground originally. I came into this valley from the south, and as I worked up the range, I found a bald spot close to the top of the hill, and a gallows-frame over an abandoned shaft. Naturally, I went down the shaft to see why it had been abandoned. To my surprise, I found a twelve-foot vein of free-milling ore, on a contact between andesite and Silurian limestone. The ledge stood straight up and down, which seemed to argue great depth."

"Somebody had found an outcropping on top of that hill," Webster declared with conviction, "and sunk a shaft on the vein to open it up and determine its width and direction. How deep was this old shaft? Thirty or forty feet?"

"Thirty-two feet. I figured it out just that way, too. After determining approximately which way the ledge was pitching, I made up my mind I'd have a tunnel driven to cut the ledge at right angles at the foot of the hill, since no practical man would mine from the top of a hill and hoist his ore through a shaft, when he could mine from the bottom and haul his ore out on cars through a tunnel. So I came prowling down into the valley and found this tunnel. The work had been abandoned for a couple of years, and after examining the tunnel I thought I knew why. They had failed to cut the ledge as they expected."

"Hum-m! And what did you do, Bill?"

"I got my transit and ran a line from the shaft on the hill, following the direction in which the ledge

was running, and marked out the exact point toward the base of the hill where I would start my tunnel to cut the ledge. To my surprise, I discovered my predecessor had selected that identical spot. So I verified my calculations and then sat down to think it over."

"You should have suspected a fault immediately." Webster chided the younger man. "'This is a volcanic country——"

"Well," Billy interrupted, "I suspected a fault, but not immediately. Remember I'm fifteen years your junior, professor. I remembered that frequent and violent earthquakes occur in this country, and it seemed to me a reasonable hypothesis to blame some ancient and particularly violent seismic disturbance, which had faulted the vein and set it over a considerable distance. According to my calculation, that other man should have cut the vein at eighty-three feet—yet he had gone on one hundred and two before quitting. So I got half a dozen peons and drove ahead nineteen feet on the other fellow's tunnel; and by Heck, Johnny, I cut the vein!"

"Bully boy! And then?"

"I drifted ten feet on the vein, and the ore suddenly gave out. It stopped just like that, proving I'd come to the upper end of the vein where it had faulted; so I just worked up and around, stopeing and sinking a winze here and there, until just about the time my cash reserve was getting pretty low I picked up the true vein and opened it up for the full width. Come in, and I'll show you."

They entered the tunnel, to the signal dismay of dozens of large bats. When they reached the vein, Webster broke off samples of the ore every three or four feet, crawled after Billy up through the stope and back to the true vein, from the face of which he also took numerous samples; then he crawled out into the sunshine again, hot, dirty, and perspiring.

"Billy, you'll be a real miner yet; see if you won't," was all the praise he tendered his youthful partner, standing beside him in anticipation of a compliment, as Webster got out his portable assay outfit.

For three days Webster worked, determining the values of each sample, only to find that his assays confirmed Billy's. Then he visited the old shaft on top of the hill, assayed samples procured there, roamed the range in the immediate vicinity, marking with expert eye the timber he would find so useful and close at hand when stulls and lagging for the tunnel should be needed; then he selected a site where the waters of the stream could be impounded in a little draw far up the hillside, and returned to camp to render his final report.

"You were right, son," he announced. "This mine is a humdinger and no mistake; if you and I live ten years we'll be worth ten millions between us—maybe more."

Billy's jaundiced eyes glowed hungrily. "We'll put in a hundred stamps——"

"Well, we'll try ten for a starter," Webster interrupted dryly, "and add more as the mine pays its

way. Our first consideration is the building of about ten miles of road through that timber, and repairs to that old dirt road connecting with the Grand Highway. I noticed there isn't much hard rock work to do, however, and we'll shoot the trees out of our way with dynamite. After we have a passable trail broken into this valley it won't take long to haul in our freight from the railroad at San Miguel de Padua. We'll cut all our frame- and foundation-timbers for the stamp-mill right here on the ground, and our other buildings will all be adobe. We'll have to put in a concrete dam up there on the hill and build a flume to the stamps. Oh, yes, my son, we'll run the stamps by water power. We'll have a five-hundred-foot drop at an ample angle, with the last hundred feet almost perpendicular; believe me, when the water comes through the penstock, anything in front will have to get out of the way. The same power will operate a little electric-light plant to light the grounds and buildings and workings, run the drills, and so on. Yes, it's the sweetest mining proposition on earth—only, like all high-class goods, it has one flaw when you examine it closely."

"You're crazy," Billy challenged. "Name the flaw!"

"Sarros!" Webster replied smilingly. "That scoundrel makes a gamble out of an otherwise sure thing. However," he added, recalling the note received from Ricardo Ruey just before his departure from Buenaventura and reflecting that to be forewarned is to be forearmed, "we'll accept the gamble.

That rascal can't live forever, and he may be eliminated before he causes us any trouble."

"What will it cost us to get this mine on a paying basis, Johnny?"

"Well, back home, I'd figure on spending at least a hundred thousand dollars; but I dare say, taking into consideration the low cost of labour in Sobrante and the raw, natural resources of power and timber right on the ground, we ought to put this deal over for fifty thousand at the outside. Praise be, I have cash enough to do the trick without calling in any help, and such being the case, we'll not waste any time but hop to the job in a hurry and make the fur fly."

"All right, Jack. What's the programme?"

"Well, first off, son, I'm not going to stay in this country and lose myself managing this mine. That's your job, because you're young and unimportant in your profession and have the ability to get away with the job. You can afford to spend the next fifteen years here, but I cannot. I can only afford to come down here every couple of years and relieve you for a vacation."

"That's the way I figured it, Jack."

"All right then, Bill, let us start in by giving you your first vacation. If you're going to dig in here and make the fur fly, you've got to be in tip-top physical condition—and you are thin and gaunted and full of chills and fever. Just before I left Buenaventura I cashed a draft for five thousand dollars on my letter of credit at the Banco Nacional, and placed it to the credit of your account there.

"To-morrow morning you will take your horse, one pack-mule, and one *mozo* and ride for San Miguel de Padua, where you will take the train for Buenaventura. In Buenaventura you may do what you blame please, but if I were you, boy, I'd try to get married and go back to the U. S. A. for my honeymoon. And when I finally hit a town that contained some regular doctors I'd let them paw me over and rebabbit me and overhaul my bearings and put me in such nice running order I'd be firing on all twelve cylinders at once.

"And when I was feeling tip-top once more I'd wire old John Stuart Webster and tell him so, after which I'd stand by for a cable from the said sourdough inviting me to return and take up my labours."

Billy's wan yellow face lighted up like a sunrise on the desert. "I guess that plan's kind of poor," he announced feelingly. "You're right, Jack. I'm in rotten condition and I ought to be right before I start. Still, if I should arrange to get married before I leave, I'd like mighty well to have a good man and true see me safely over the hurdles."

"That's nice, son, but I haven't time to be your best man. Arranging the honeymoon lets me out, Bill. I'm in a hurry to finish here and get back, so the sooner we both start our prospective jobs the sooner we'll finish. Have a quiet little marriage, Bill, without any fuss or feathers or voices breathing o'er Eden. What are the odds, provided you get hitched properly? Besides, I'm in mortal dread of that town of Buenaventura. The sewer system is bad; it's

rotten with fever; and you'd better get that girl out of it P. D. Q., and the quicker the better. Myself, I prefer to stay up here in these mountains in a temperate climate where there are no mosquitoes."

Billy saw that Webster was serious and would resent any interference in his plans. "All right, Jack," he assented. "You're the boss."

"Fine. Now, Bill, you listen to father and be guided accordingly. When you get to Buenaventura, wire the Bingham Engineering Company, of Denver, using my name, and tell them to add to my order given them last month and held for shipping directions, twelve dozen picks, twelve dozen shovels, twelve dozen mattocks, say, six dozen axes, brush knives, a big road plow, and whatever other things you happen to think of and which would come in handy when building our road. Also, when you get to New Orleans, buy a ton of dynamite and an adequate supply of fuse and fulminating caps, pay for it and ship it to me at Buenaventura. Further, look around in New Orleans and buy a stanch three ton motor truck. We'll need it for getting in supplies from San Miguel de Padua. Pay for the truck also, and if you go broke and cannot reach me by cable, wire Neddy Jerome at the Engineers' Club in Denver and kick his eye out in my honoured name.

"I guess that's about all of your job, Bill. As for me, I'll camp right here. I'll have a deal of surveying to do and I plan to sweat the booze out of that Cafferty person. I'll make Don Juan my chain man and run the tail off him. Then I'll be busy with

preliminary plans, arranging for labour [illegible], and when I'm idle I'll go hunting."

In conformity with this plan, therefore, Billy said good-bye to his friend and packed out for San Miguel de Padua bright and early next morning. During the following ten days Webster managed to keep himself fairly busy around the camp at the mine; then for a week he hunted and fished, and finally, when that began to pall on him, his agile mind returned to business and the consideration of the possibility of a flaw in Billy's title to the claim; whereupon he suddenly decided to return to Buenaventura and investigate that title fully before proceeding to throw dollars right and left. While socially he was wildly prodigal with his dollars, in business matters no Scotchman was more canny or more careful of his baubees.

At the head of his little cavalcade, therefore, he rode out one morning for the railroad, whereat Providence, in its inscrutable wisdom, ordained that en route he should fall in with no less a personage than Don Ricardo Luiz Ruey, *ne* Andrew Bowers. Ricardo was mounted, armed, and alone, and at sight of Webster he shouted with delight and spurred toward him.

"What the devil! You, Rick, the government cut-up. What are you doing in these parts?" Webster rode up and shook hands.

"Oh, I'm Robin Hooding it around this part of the country. It is so secluded, you know, and Sarros hasn't any friends or any telegraph lines or any gar-

risons up this way. I heard in San Miguel de Padua that you were camped yonder, and I was on my way over to confer with you on matters of state."

"You'll have to confer as we ride along. How does your business progress, Rick?"

"Beyond my wildest expectations. By the way, I need your help, friend Webster."

"I'll do anything within reason, Rick."

"I figured you would, so I have already imposed on your good nature to a slight extent. Met your friend Geary at El Buen Amigo a couple of weeks ago, just before he sailed for the United States. He was telling me you had to have a lot of tools for road building, so I cabled in a secret cipher to the Sobrantean revolutionary junta in New Orleans to ship these tools to you immediately. They arrived on the last trip of the *Atlanta* and now repose in Leber's warehouse waiting for you to call and remove them."

"You scoundrel! What have you sent me?"

"A couple of hundred rifles and three machine-guns, branded axes, picks, shovels, plows, and so on. I also ran in three cases of ammunition, labelled grindstones, two more cases disguised as bolts, and quite several thousand labelled nails in kegs. I should feel rather sorry for you if my friend Sarros should get suspicious and investigate, but I haven't any fear that he will. You see, he knows you're here on legitimate business. He has investigated and learned that you are a bona fide mining engineer of considerable reputation—and then, you know, your friend Geary dickered with him for the concession.

The mining property you are about to develop belongs to the people, not to Sarros; yet he has bartered it away and will divert the royalty to his own pocket instead of the public treasury."

"Hum-m-m! What do you want me to do with all those munitions consigned to me?"

"Arrange with Leber to keep them there until you get ready to build your road into the mine. I want them there when my American mercenaries arrive in Buenaventura. By the way, you are going to import these mercenaries for me. They are American miners and road-builders in the employ of the Honda Mining & Development Company, which is to be the name of your enterprise. I hope you'll like the name, Webster. I picked it out myself."

"You cool scoundrel! You're making a cat's paw out of me."

"That is because you happen to be so handy for my purpose. You see my plan, do you not? I'm going to attack Buenaventura from within and without. I'm going to come down on Sarros like a wolf on the fold, and the job is scheduled for next Saturday night a week."

"Look here, Rick, my boy, I have no desire to mix in the politics of this country."

"You have some desire, however, to mix in its wealth," Ricardo reminded him.

"Well?"

"I'm the only man that can help you. By the way, do not order your machinery shipped until after I am seated firmly on the throne of my fathers."

"Why?"

"It's been framed with Sarros to let you spend your money on that concession and get the mine in running order; then a fake suit, alleging an error in the government survey, will be filed. It will be claimed that the concession given your friend Geary is, by virtue of erroneous government surveys, the property of a citizen of Sobrante. The courts here do as Sarros tells them. You are to be kicked out, busted, and despairing, and your nicely equipped little mine will be taken over as a government monopoly and run for the benefit of the government, to wit, Sarros and his satellites. We had to cook up a dirty deal like that to save your life. Of course, now that I have warned you in time, you are safe. We schemed a proposition, however, that worked both ways. It enabled us to save you and to save us, by permitting the shipment, free of suspicion, of arms for the rebels that are to attack the city from within. Naturally I had to cache their arms within the city—and that was a hard problem until you happened along. Thank you, fairy godfather."

"My thanks are due you, Ricardo. I'm for you, first, last, and all the time, and against this Sarros outfit. By the way, how do you purpose moving your machine-guns?"

"We'll have to carry them, I guess."

"Well, I'll have a small auto-truck delivered in Buenaventura by that time. You might arrange to armour it with sheet steel; and with a couple of machine-guns mounted in it, and a crew of resolute

Americans behind the machine-guns, you could caper from one end of the city to the other and clear a path for your infantry."

"Thank you, my friend. I'll borrow the motor truck and arrange to armour it. That's a bully idea. Are you bound for Buenaventura now?"

Webster nodded. "Then," Ricardo suggested, "I'll meet you in my room at El Buen Amigo next Wednesday night at eleven and explain the details of my plans to you if you care to hear them. I think they're air-tight myself, but somehow I think I'd feel more certain of them if you approve them."

"I'll be there, Rick, and the day you run that outlaw Sarros off the grass you'll know why I am for you."

"Good-bye, old man. You will never know how grateful you have made me."

Ruey shook hands with Webster and rode off through the timber, leaving John Stuart Webster to pursue the even tenor of his way, until at length he arrived once more in Buenaventura and sought accommodations at the Hotel Mateo. And there, as he entered the lobby and gazed through a glass door across the *patio* and into the veranda, he saw that which disturbed him greatly. In a big wicker rocker Dolores Ruey sat, rocking gently and busily stitching on a piece of fancy work!

Billy Geary gone back to the United States, and Dolores was still in Buenaventura! Amazing! Why, what the devil did Billy mean by letting her have her own way like that? Of course they hadn't been

married, or she would not now be out there on the veranda, and of course they hadn't quarrelled, because that was an impossibility, and of course Billy had departed alone for the U. S. A., else he would have returned to their camp in the hills back of San Miguel de Padua.

"Well, I know what I'm going to do," Webster decided. "I'm not going to be led into temptation while Billy's not on the job—so I'll not put up at the Hotel Mateo after all. I'll just sneak around to El Buen Amigo and fix it with that old Mother Jenks not to tip off my presence in town to Dolores Ruey until I can get the lay of the land and see what the devil has happened to all my well-laid plans."

He retreated out the front door and called a carriage, into which he was about to step, bag and baggage, when Don Juan Cafetéro came rushing up in great excitement. "Sure, where are ye goin' now, sor. Is there no room for ye in the Hotel Mateo?"

"Their beds have jiggers in them, and I just remembered that," Webster fibbed. "Hop in, John, and we'll drive around to Mr. Geary's lodgings in El Buen Amigo."

"But I come t'rough the *patio* just now," Don Juan explained, "an' who should I meet but the young leddy."

"You infernal scoundrel! Did you tell her I was in town?"

"Sure I did, sor. An' why not?"

"None of your infernal business. You've spoiled everything. You're a muddle-headed monkey and

I've a great notion to let you get drunk again. Take the baggage back into the hotel."

Don Juan Cafetéro, greatly humbled and rebuffed, stepped aside and watched Webster stride back into the hotel. "God love ye, sor," he mumbled, "knowin' what I know, is it likely I'd let ye make a monkey out av her or yerself? Ye made yer plans wit' Misther Geary wit'out consultin' her. Now go, ye grrand big divil, an' find out why she kicked yer schame to smithereens." And with a solemn and knowing wink at the duffle-bag, Don Juan picked that article up and followed after his master.

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

JOHN STUART WEBSTER'S agile brain was the repository of many conflicting emotions as he bathed, shaved, and changed from his soiled khaki field clothes to a suit of ducks before presenting himself before Dolores.

Had Billy's courage forsaken him at the last minute, with the result that he had gone back to the United States without having settled the question of Dolores's future? Had he proposed and been rejected, or had he proposed, been accepted, and had his plans for an immediate marriage vetoed by Dolores?

In either event, why had Billy failed to leave a note for him at the Hotel Mateo, or mailed him a letter to the Globo de Oro at San Miguel de Padua, advising him of the change in the plan of action outlined for him by Webster?

If Dolores had accepted him, then Billy Geary was just the sort of impulsive youth who could not rest until he had advised Webster of his luck; on the other hand, Billy was susceptible, in matters of love, to the deep melancholia which is as distinct a characteristic of the Hibernian nature as wit and light-heartedness, and in the event of disappointment he would not be apt to rush to his partner with the news; a feeling of chagrin would prompt him to keep

his own counsel, to go away and stay away until he had smothered the ache and could return and meet Dolores without restraint and embarrassment.

In the simplicity of his single-hearted devotion Webster was puzzled to understand how any woman in her right mind could fail to fall in love with Billy Geary. To begin, he was a fine-looking lad and would look finer when the chills and fever had been eradicated; he was far from being a runt, mentally or physically; he was gentle, well-mannered, kind, with the gift of turning a pretty speech to a woman and meaning it with all his heart and soul. A man he was, from heels to hair, and a man with prospects far above the average. To Webster's way of thinking, the girl who married Billy might well count herself fortunate.

Dolores greeted him with unaffected pleasure. "Well, Caliph!" she said. Just that. It made Webster sensible of a feeling of having returned to her after an absence of several years. "I'm so glad to see you, Miss Ruey," he replied, and added boldly, "particularly since I didn't expect to."

She knew what her reply would lead to; nevertheless, with that dissimulation which can only be practised in perfection by a clever and beautiful woman, she answered with equal boldness: "Indeed! Pray why?"

"Well, for a pretty good reason, I think. A few weeks ago, after examining Bill's concession very thoroughly, I told him he was a potential millionaire. Now, while I disclaim any appearance of braggadocio,

when John Stuart Webster, E.M., makes any mine owner a report like that, he is apt to be taken very seriously. And having made Bill a potential millionaire and arranged to give him three or four months' vacation back home, I had a notion he'd present to you a very valid reason why you should accompany him."

"You are very frank, Caliph."

"That's because I'm curious. You do not mind being equally frank with an old cuss like me, do you, and telling me just why Bill's plans miscarried? Because he had a certain dream, and told me about it, and I did my little best to make it come true. You see, Miss Ruey, I'm a lot older than Bill, and I've known him since he was eighteen years old; I feel a responsibility toward him that is almost paternal."

"I think I understand, Caliph. It would be very difficult, I think, for anybody to meet Billy without being attracted toward him. He's one of the dearest, most lovable boys in the world—and he did do me the signal honour of asking me to marry him. So there!"

"Well, and why didn't you?"

She smiled at his blunt insistence on forcing the issue. "For a number of excellent reasons, Caliph. In the first place, he wanted me to marry him immediately—and I wasn't ready to leave Sobrante, while Billy was. Indeed, it was highly necessary that he should leave immediately, for the sake of his health, and I had Billy's interest at heart sufficiently to insist upon it. You seem to forget that when a

girl marries she must make some preparation for the event, and if she has any close relatives, such as a brother, for instance, she likes to have that relative present at the ceremony. You will recall, Caliph, that I have a brother and that you have promised to introduce me to him very shortly. Much as you love Billy, would you insist upon depriving me of the joy of meeting my brother on the day of his triumph—on the day of the triumph of our family—just to please Billy by marrying him on ten minutes' notice, and leaving on a honeymoon next day? That is what you would refer to as crowding my hand and joggling my elbow."

"By Judas, I never thought of that, Miss Ruey," the repentant Webster answered. "In fact, I wasn't thinking of anybody's interest in this matter but Bill's.'

"Not even of mine, Caliph?" reproachfully.

"That goes without saying. Could I have done anything nicer for you than fix it for Bill so he would be in position to marry you? Here you are, practically alone in the world—at least you were when Bill met you and fell in love with you—and I know that boy so well I was convinced, after meeting you, that his future happiness and yours would best be conserved if you married him. I hope you do not think I was presumptuous in thinking this, or that I am presumptuous now in speaking my mind so frankly. I realize this is a most unusual conversation——"

"Quite to be expected of an unusual man, Caliph. And I do not think you were one bit presumptuous.

It was wonderfully dear of you, and I am profoundly grateful that Billy and I have such a true, unselfish friend, whose first thought is for our happiness. I knew I was going to like you before Billy introduced us—and I think more of you than ever, now that I know you're a dear, blundering old matchmaker. Of course you realize how badly I felt to think I couldn't accede to Billy's plan. Billy's such a dear, it quite broke my heart to disappoint him, but a little temporary unhappiness will not ruin Billy, will it? It makes me feel blue to talk about it, Caliph."

"Not at all, not at all, Miss Ruey. Bill is one of the impulsive, whirlwind kind, up in the clouds today and down in the slough of despond to-morrow. He'll survive the shock. Of course, it would have been pretty nice if your affairs had permitted you to accompany Bill; I never had a honeymoon myself, but it must be a great institution, and I was all wrapped up in the notion of seeing Bill have what I'd never had myself—a honeymoon and a wife and kids and money enough to enjoy 'em all the way that God intended a real man and woman to enjoy them. However, I'm glad to know everything will come out all right. Seeing you here gave me a momentary chill; thought a cog had slipped somewhere, so I helped myself to Cupid's license and asked. A man cannot learn very much from a woman unless he asks questions, can he? I mean on the subject of love."

She smiled a little, wistful, knowing smile. "No, Caliph," she answered seriously, "somehow the

Master of Things ordained that on the subject of love man must do all the talking."

"Yes, but on the other hand, woman has the last word—as usual. However, the only thing in your case and Billy's that worries me is the thought that since Bill left his magnet behind he will be drawn back here before he is in the kind of shape, physically, that I want him to be in before he relieves me on the job so I can go away."

"Do not worry on that point, Caliph. I am your ally there; between us both I think we can manage him."

"Fine business! Miss Ruey, if that boy Bill ever gets a notion in his head that you haven't forgotten more than he'll ever know, I'll break his neck. And with those few kind words we'll dismiss William until you care to talk about him again, although if you're as deep in love as Bill you'll not stay off the subject very long.

"How is Don Juan Cafetéro, Caliph?"

"Coming out in the wash and without his colours running. I've sweated the booze out of him, hiking him over the hills, and bullied him into eating solids, and a few days ago I shut off the firewater forever, I hope. However, I'll have to watch him very closely for a long time yet—particularly in town. Out at the mine he'll be away from temptation. Hard work is the best cure for Don Juan. There's a deal of truth in the old saying that Satan will find mischief for idle hands to do. I imagine you've been rather idle lately. Hope you haven't been into mischief."

"I haven't been idle. I've made several dresses

for Mother Jenks and done a lot of fancy work and begun the study of my mother tongue. If my brother should become president of this country, it would ill become his sister not be able to speak Spanish. By the way, Billy told me you were going to remain up in the hills quite a while yet. What brought you back to town so soon?"

"Expected I'd have some freight arriving shortly; besides, I wanted to make certain the title to Bill's property didn't have any flaws in it."

"How long will you remain in Buenaventura?"

Considering the fact that he was no longer subject to temptation, since the object of his temptation was now definitely promised to his friend Billy, Webster suddenly decided to remain until the political atmosphere should be cleared, although prior to his conversation with Dolores he had cherished a definite plan to go back to the hills within forty-eight hours. He could not suppress an ironic grin, despite the pain and misery of his predicament, as he reflected how often, of late, he had made up his mind to a definite course of action, only to change it promptly at some new whim of fate.

"I'm going back," he replied soberly, "after I have kept my promise and introduced you to your brother in the government palace. If I cannot introduce him to you there, the title to our mining concession will be clouded, in which event it will not be necessary for Billy or myself to fuss with it further."

He related to her the information gleaned from her brother two days previously.

"It's no use for an individual to fight a government despot in courts ccntrolled by the latter," he concluded. "Your brother must win and depose the Sarros; then with the title to the property certified by the government as without a flaw, I may dare to spend fifty thousand dollars developing it."

"And if my brother doesn't win?"

"I may never have an opportunity to present you to him. We mustn't be squeamish about this matter, Miss Ruey. If Ricardo doesn't turn the trick, he may go the way of his father, unless he can manage to get out of the country."

She was silent a minute, digesting this grim alternative. "And you?" she queried presently. "What will happen to you? As I understand it, you are existing now under a temporary license."

"I shall endeavour to leave also—with dignity. I can always land a pretty good job back home, and wherever I'm superintendent the next best job belongs to Billy. The Lord is our shepherd; we shall not want."

"As I understand it, then, Caliph, Ricardo hopes to win his revolution when he strikes the first blow."

"I think so. I dare say Ricardo hopes to take Sarros by surprise, bottle the city garrison up in the *cuartel* and the government palace and there besiege them. Having secured nominal control of a seaport, he can import arms and ammunition; also he can recruit openly, and at his leisure hunt down the outlying garrisons. The Sarros crowd doesn't suspect his presence in Sobrante, and by a quick, savage

stroke he should be able to jerk this one-horse government up by the heels in jig time—particularly since the citizenry feel no loyalty toward the Sarros régime and are only kept in subjection through fear and lack of a leader. I'm going to play Ricardo to win, if he isn't killed in the opening row, for I'm certain he'll lead his men."

"I dare say he is greatly like his father—not afraid to die for his country," she replied presently. "I am glad to be here when he takes that risk."

"Oh, but you mustn't be here," Webster protested.

"Why?"

"Because there'll be street fighting—probably of a desperate character, and I understand your countrymen go rather war-mad and do things not sanctioned by the Hague tribunal. If there's a steamer in port at the time I'll put you aboard her until the issue is decided. She'll have to remain in port because while the fighting goes on she cannot load or discharge."

"I could go to the American consulate," she suggested.

"You could—but you'll not. That consul would give you up to the first mob that called for you—and I'm not so certain that even the sister of an arch-traitor (for patriots and revolutionists are always traitors when they lose) would be safe from the Sarros fury. However, I'm going to see Ricardo tomorrow night and learn the details of his plan of campaign; after that I'll be able to act intelligently."

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

RICARDO RUEY, with Doctor Pacheco and Colonel Caraveo, were engaged in consultation when Jack Webster, having left the Hotel Mateo via his bedroom window in order to avoid possible espionage and made his way to El Buen Amigo on foot, was announced by Mother Jenks. The three conspirators greeted him joyously, as indeed they should, for his loyal friendship had thus far been one of their principal bulwarks.

"Well," Webster inquired, after greeting them and carefully closing the door behind him, "here I am in Beunaventura, marking time and, like Mr. Micawber, waiting for something to turn up."

"You will not be required to wait long," Colonel Caraveo assured him. "Thanks to your kindly offices, the trap is already baited."

"Our friend Ruey has, since our first meeting, insisted on dispensing with my consent when using me to promote his enterprises, Colonel. Strange to say, I have been unable to berate him for his impudence. I was down at Leber's warehouse this afternoon. You have enough road-making tools consigned to me there to build a pretty fair highway to the gates of the government palace, I should say. I hope you have all pondered the result to me, an

innocent bystander, if your enemies should take a notion to open one of those cases of shovels."

Colonel Caraveo favoured him with a benignant smile. "You forget, my friend, that I am second in command in the Intelligence Department, and that during the absence of your particular friend Raoul Sarros, in New Orleans, I am first in command. Since I already know what those cases contain, naturally I shall not take the trouble to investigate."

"Well, that's a comfort, Colonel."

"You have investigated your mining concession, Webster?" Ricardo Ruey asked.

"You bet."

"What did you find?"

"A couple of millions in sight."

Ricardo shook his head slowly. "It is not in sight, old man," he reminded Webster. "Without our aid—and you cannot have our aid unless our revolution is successful, when you shall have it freely—your millions are, most positively, not in sight. If you want those millions, friend Webster, there is but one way to get them—and that is to close your eyes and play our game to the limit."

"It seems to me I've been showing a pretty willing spirit right along—and that without being consulted in the matter, Rick."

"You're one man in a million. I wonder if you'd go further—about forty thousand dollars further, to be exact."

"I might, but I never go it blind for a wad like that. What's your trouble?"

"The revolution will fail if you decide to deny my request. I realize I have the most amazing presumption to ask anything of you, and yet I am moved to stake my all on your goodness of heart, having already had ample evidence of that goodness. In other words, I am going to apply the old principle of driving a willing horse to death.

"The individual in charge of the funds of the revolutionary junta in New Orleans was murdered last night; the funds were deposited to his credit as agent in a certain bank, and before the junta can obtain legal possession of them again the psychological time for their use will have passed.

"We have a steamer chartered, and two hundred men, whose business it is to fight under any flag at five dollars gold per day and no questions asked, are now marking time on the Isle of Pines, off the coast of Cuba, waiting for our steamer to call for them and land them, with their rifles and ammunition and six seventy-five-millimeter field-guns and some rapid-fire Maxims, at San Bruno, some eighteen miles up the coast from here.

"The guns and munitions are now in Tampa, having been shipped to our agent there on sight draft, with bill of lading attached; the steamer is chartered and en route to Tampa from Norfolk, Virginia, and we must pay the owners ten thousand dollars the day she begins taking on her cargo, and ten thousand dollars before she unloads it on lighters at San Bruno.

"We must also pay two hundred men one month's pay in advance—that is, thirty thousand dollars;

we cannot meet this expense and still take up that sight draft now awaiting our attention in the bank at Tampa.

"In return for this favour to the provisional government of Sobrante, you shall have the note of the provisional government, signed by the provisional president, myself, and the provisional cabinet, Doctor Pachecho, Colonel Caraveo, and two other gentlemen whom you will meet in due course unless in the interim they should be killed. And as a bonus for saving this country from a brutal dictator, who is pillaging its resources for his personal profit, you shall have a deed of gift to that mining concession you and your friend Geary are so desirous of working; also the title shall be certified by the government and the Supreme Court of Sobrante and absolutely secured to you against future aggression in the event that the new régime should be overthrown at some future date. Also you have my profound gratitude and that of my people."

"Tell me your plan of campaign," Webster suggested.

"In a secret rendezvous in the mountains I have one thousand picked men—my father's veterans. They are armed with modern rifles and machetes. The nitrate company, which has been suffering from heavy export duties imposed by Sarros, would help us financially, I think, but it is not well for a provisional government to begin by asking financial favours of a huge foreign corporation; so, much to the surprise of their local manager, to whom I have con-

fided my plans, I have merely asked for the loan of all the rolling stock of the railroad for one night. It will be mobilized at San Miguel de Padua by next Saturday night; my troops will arrive late the same afternoon and entrain at once.

"In the interim all telephone and telegraph communications with Buenaventura will be severed. The night previous our steamer will have discharged her cargo of men and munitions at San Bruno; a chain of outposts will at once be established and all communication with the capital will be shut off.

"On Saturday night, also, the Consolidated Fruit Company's steamer *La Estrellita* will make port with thirty Americans in her steerage. These men will be road-makers and miners imported by Mr. J. S. Webster, and in order to make certain that they will come, you have already ordered them by cable. I took the liberty of seeing to it that the cable signed by you was sent to New Orleans several days ago, and as part of the bluff of keeping all of your movements under surveillance, a copy of this cablegram was furnished to the subordinate of our good Colonel Caraveo, charged with reporting on your movements. We have arranged with the port doctor to give *La Estrellita* a clean bill of health the very night she arrives. Hence the ship's authorities will not be suspicious, I hope, when we remove our men after dark and house them in Leber's warehouse, where they will spend the night unpacking those spades, picks, and shovels of yours and getting the factory grease off them.

"At four o'clock in the morning various citizens of Sobrante, with rebellion in their hearts, will begin to mobilize at Leber's warehouse, where they will be issued rifles and ammunition and where they will wait until the action is opened to the south by the detachment from San Bruno, which, having marched from San Bruno the night before, will have arrived outside the city, and will be awaiting the signal from me. I will attack from the west—cautiously.

"Now, there are five thousand government troops in the city and in various cantonments on the outskirts. These cantonments are to be rushed and set afire; I figure that the confusion of our sudden attack will create a riot—particularly when I do something that isn't very popular as a war feature down this way, and that is charge—and keep on coming. Down this way, you know, Webster, a battle consists in a horrible wastage of ammunition at long range, and casualties of three killed and twelve wounded. The good, old-fashioned charge isn't to their liking; they hate cold steel.

"These government troops will start to fall back on the city, only to find themselves flanked by a fierce artillery fire from the San Bruno contingent; the troops from the arsenal, the Guards at the palace and the Fifteenth Regiment of Infantry, now stationed at the Cuartel de Infanteria, next the government palace, will be dispatched post haste to repulse the attack, and four hundred men, with the machine-gun company waiting in Leber's warehouse, will promptly move upon them from the rear and capture

the arsenal. There are a few thousand rifles and a lot of ammunition stored there; I miss my guess if, as soon as the news of its capture by the rebels spreads through the city (and I shall have men to spread it), I shall not have a few thousand volunteers eager to help overthrow Sarros.

"When the government troops find themselves under the kind of shell-fire I've prepared for them, and with machine guns and Maxims playing on them, in close formation from the rear, they'll surrender in droves—if they live to surrender.

"Once cut off from the arsenal and the palace, Sarros must fight his way out of the city in order to have the slightest chance to suppress the rebellion, for he will have no refuge in the city. And with the railroad and all the rolling stock in our hands, without a commissary for his troops, without a base of supplies, even should the government troops fight their way through, they leave the city in my hands and I'll recruit and arm my men and hunt them down like jack-rabbits at my leisure. Once let the arsenal and the palace fall into my hands, once let me proclaim myself provisional president, once let the people know that Ricardo Ruey, the Beloved, lives again in the person of his son, and I tell you, Webster, this country is saved."

"You lead the army from San Miguel de Padua, Ricardo. Who leads the detachment from San Bruno?"

"Colonel Caraveo."

"And the machine-gun company from Leber's warehouse?"

"Doctor Pacheco. How do you like my plan of campaign?"

"It couldn't be any better if I had planned it myself. You might accept my suggestion and armour that little motor truck of mine. It arrived on yesterday's steamer."

"And some armour sheet steel with it—sheet steel already loopholed for the barrels of the two machine guns it will carry!" Doctor Pacheco cried joyously.

"Have you provided a chauffeur, Doctor?"

"I have—likewise an armoured sheet-steel closet for him to sit in while chauffeuring."

"Don't forget the oil and gasoline," Webster cautioned him quizzically.

"How about that loan to the provisional government?" Ricardo demanded pointedly.

Webster did not hesitate. After all, what was money to him now? Moreover, he was between the devil and the deep sea, as it were. Billy had gone away, his hopes raised high, already a millionaire after the fashion of mining men, who are ever ready to count their chicks before they are hatched, provided only they see the eggs. Besides, there was Dolores. Full well Webster realized that Billy, tossed back once more into the jaws of the well-known wolf of poverty, would not have the courage upon his return to Sobrante to ask Dolores to share his poverty with him; should the revolution fail, Ricardo Ruey would be an outcast, a hunted man with a price on his head, and in no position to care for his sister, even should he survive long enough to

know he had a sister. Webster thought of her—so sweet, so winsome, so brave and trusting, so worthy of all that the world might hold for her of sweetness and comfort. She would be alone in the world if he, John Stuart Webster, failed her now—more than ever she needed a man's strength and affection to help her navigate the tide-rips of life, for life to a woman, alone and unprotected and dependent upon her labour for the bread she must eat, must contain, at best, a full measure of terror and despair and loneliness. He pictured her through a grim processional of years of skimping and petty sacrifices—and all because he, John Stuart Webster, had hesitated to lend a dreamer and an idealist a paltry forty thousand dollars without security.

No, there was no alternative. As they say in Mexico, Ricardo had him *tiron*, meaning there was no escape. If his friendship for Billy was worth a sou, it was worth forty thousand dollars; if his silent, unrequited love for Dolores Ruey was worthy of her, no sacrifice on his part could be too great, provided it guaranteed her happiness.

"Ruined again," he sighed. "This is only another of those numerous occasions when the tail goes with the hide. How soon do you want the money?"

Ricardo Luiz Ruey leaned forward and gazed very earnestly at John Stuart Webster. "Do you really trust me that much, my friend?" he asked feelingly. "Remember, I am asking you for forty thousand dollars on faith."

"Old sport," John Stuart Webster answered, "you

went overboard in Buenaventura harbour and took a chance among those big, liver-coloured, hammer-headed sharks. And you did that because you had a cause you thought worth dying for. I never knew a man who had a cause that was worth dying for who would even espouse a cause worth swindling for. You win—only I want you to understand one thing, Ricardo: I'm not doing this for the sake of saving that mining concession the Sarros government gave my friend Geary. I'm above doing a thing like this for money—for myself. It seems to me I must do it to guarantee the happiness of two people I love: my friend Geary and the girl he's going to marry. I reject your promissory note and your promise of a deed of gift for that concession, and accept only your gratitude. There are no strings to this loan, because it isn't a loan at all. It's a bet. If you lose, I'll help you get out of the country and absolve you of any indebtedness to me. We'll just make a new book and start making bets all over again, Rick. However, if you should win, I know you'll reimburse me from the national treasury."

"And you do not desire a bonus?"

"Nothing that will cost the citizens of this country one penny of their heritage. I'm going to bet this money—bet it, understand, not loan it, because a loan predicates repayment at some future date, and for the sake of my self-respect as a business man I'd hate to make a bum loan of that magnitude on no security. However, if you want to be a sport and grant me a little favour in return, you can."

"Name it, friend."

"As soon as you have been recognized by the United States, I want you to have your ambassador in Washington make representations to my government that the present American consul in Sobrante is not acceptable to your government. That fellow is a disgrace to my native land and I want him fired."

"It shall be my first official act after freeing my country from a tyrant's yoke."

"Another little favour also, Ricardo." This time Webster spoke in English.

"Fire away."

"After I give you this money, I don't want the Doctor and the Colonel to kiss me to show how grateful they are."

"You wonderful fellow! Jack Webster, if I had a sister I should want her to marry you."

"Shows how little you'd think of your sister—staking her to a sentimental jackass. Shall I cable the money to New Orleans in the morning? I have a letter of credit for my entire bank-roll, and I can give a draft at the Banco Nacional, and have them cable a New Orleans bank."

"That will do very nicely."

"To whom shall I cable the money?"

"Send it to the Picayune National Bank of New Orleans, with instructions to credit account Number 246, J. E. P., trustee. In this little game we are playing, my friend, it is safer to deal in numbers and initials rather than names. The local cable office leaks quite regularly."

"Very well, Ricardo, I'll attend to it first thing in the morning. Where are you going to armour that motor truck?"

"If you'll have it run over to the nitrate company's machine shop at the railway terminus the foreman there will attend to the job and keep the truck under cover until Friday night, when they'll run it back to Leber's warehouse for the machine guns Sunday morning."

"Is Leber in on this deal?"

"He is not. What Leber doesn't know will not worry him. He doesn't live in his warehouse, you know. We're just going to take possession after dark, when the water-front is absolutely deserted. There's a concert on the Malecon that night, and everybody who can ride or walk will be out there listening to it."

Webster nodded his approval of Ricardo's clever plans. "All right, old man, go to it and win, or there'll be several new faces whining around the devil, not the least of which will be mine. When you charge, remember you're charging for my forty thousand dollars—and go through with it. I worked rather hard for that forty thousand, and if I must lose it, I do not want to do it in a half-hearted fight. Give me, at least, a bloody run for my money. I'll have a reserved seat somewhere watching the game."

"If you'll take my advice, you'll go aboard *La Estrellita* and stay there until the issue is decided. When the first gun is fired, it signals the open season on mining engineers who butt in on affairs of state."

"What! And me with a healthy bet down on the result! I hope I'm a better sport than that."

"You're incorrigible. Be careful, then, and don't get yourself potted by a stray bullet. When these brownies of mine get excited, they shoot at every head in sight."

"Shall I see you fellows before the blow-off?"

"I scarcely think so."

"Then if you're through with me, I'll bid you all good-bye and good luck. I'll have dinner with you in the palace Sunday evening."

"Taken."

"May I bring a guest?"

"By all means."

Webster shook hands with the trio and departed for his hotel. For the first time in many years he was heavy of heart, crushed. "Neddy Jerome was right," he soliloquized. "This is the last place on earth for me to have come to. I've made Neddy sore on me, and he's lost patience and put another man in the job he promised me; I've raised Billy's hopes sky-high and had to bet forty thousand dollars to keep them there; I've been fool enough to fall in love with my friend's fiancée; I'm a human cat's-paw, and the finest thing I can do now is to go out next Sunday morning with that machine-gun company from Leber's warehouse and get killed. And I would, too, in a holy second, if killing a dozen of these spiggoties were part of a mining engineer's business. I just don't belong in this quarrel and I cannot kill for pleasure or profit. All I get out of this deal is

gratitude and empty honour, where I dreamed of love and a home in my old age. John Stuart Webster, the family friend! Well, after all, it isn't every old sour-dough that has an opportunity to be a liberator, and even if I have lost Dolores, I have this melancholy satisfaction: I have a rattling good chance of getting that scrubby American consul."

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

THE following morning Webster informed Dolores fully of his interview with her brother and his confrères the night before, concealing from her only the fact that he was financing the revolution and his reasons for financing it. He was still depressed, and Dolores, observing his mood, forbore to intrude upon it. Intuitively she realized that when a man is worried and harassed by matters he cannot or dares not divulge, he dislikes being talked to, but prefers to be alone and wrestle with them in silence. Accordingly she claimed the prerogative of her sex—a slight headache—and retreated to her room, in the privacy of which she was suddenly very much surprised to find herself weeping softly because John Stuart Webster was unhappy and didn't deserve to be.

It was impossible, however, for Webster long to remain impervious to the note of ridiculousness underlying the forthcoming tragic events. Here was a little two-by-four poverty-stricken hot-bed of ignorance and intrigue calling itself a republic, a little stretch of country no larger than a couple of big western counties, about to indulge in the national pastime of civil war and unable to do it except by grace of an humble citizen of a sister republic!

Five thousand ignorant, ill-equipped, ill-drilled semi-brigands calling themselves soldiers, entrusted with the task of enabling one of their number to ride, horse and dog, over a million people!

How farcical! No wonder Ricardo, with his northern viewpoint, approached his patriotic task with gayety, almost with contempt. And when Webster recalled that the about-to-be-born provisional government had casually borrowed from him the sum of forty thousand dollars in order to turn the trick—borrowing it, forsooth, in much the same spirit as a commuter boarding his train without the necessary fare hails a neighbour and borrows ten cents—his natural optimism asserted itself and he chuckled as in fancy he heard himself telling the story to Neddy Jerome and being branded a liar for his pains.

"Well, I've had one comfort ever since I first saw that girl," he reflected philosophically. "While I've never been so unhappy in all my life before, or had to tear my soul out by the roots so often, things have been coming my way so fast from other directions that I haven't had much opportunity to dwell on the matter. And for these compensating offsets, good Lord, I thank thee."

He was John Stuart Webster again when Dolores saw him next; during the succeeding days his mood of cheerfulness and devil-may-care indifference never left him. And throughout that period of marking time Dolores was much in his society, a condition which he told himself was not to his liking but which,

nevertheless, he could not obviate without seeming indifferent to her happiness. And to permit his friend's fiancée to languish in loneliness and heart-break did not appear to John Stuart Webster as the part of a true friend or a courtly gentleman —and he remembered that she had once called him that.

They rode together in the cool of the morning; they drove together on the Malecon in the cool of the evening; chaperoned by Don Juan Cafetéro and a grinning Sobrantean, they went shark-fishing in Leber's launch; they played dominoes together; they discussed, throughout the long, lazy, quiet afternoons, when the remainder of their world retired for the siesta, books, art, men, women, and things.

And not once, throughout those two weeks of camaraderie, did the heart-racked Webster forget for a single instant that he was the new friend, destined to become the old friend; never, to the girl's watchful eyes, did he betray the slightest disposition to establish their friendly relations on a closer basis.

Thus did the arrival of The Day find them. Toward sunset they rode out together along the bay shore and noted far out to sea the smear of smoke that marked the approach of *La Estrellita*—on schedule time. As they jogged homeward in the dusk, her red and green side-lights were visible as she crept into the harbour; above the sobbing murmur of the Caribbean wavelets they heard the scream of her winches and the rattle of chain as her anchor bit the bottom.

"You will go aboard her to-night," Webster said very quietly to Dolores.

"And you?"

"I shall go aboard with you. I have arranged with Don Juan for him to stay ashore and to come out in Leber's launch with the first reliable news of the conflict. If Ricardo wins the city, he wins the revolution, and you and I will then go ashore—to dine with him in the palace. If he loses the city, he loses the revolution, and we will both do well to remain aboard *La Estrellita.*"

"And in that event, what will become of my brother?"

"I do not know; I forgot to ask him, but if he survives, I imagine he'll have sense enough to know he's whipped and will retreat on San Bruno, fighting a rear-guard action, embark aboard the steamer that brought his men there, and escape."

"But he has so few men," she quavered.

"Two hundred of them are white soldiers of fortune—and you must remember how Walker manhandled Nicaragua with that number of men."

"I'm worried about Mother Jenks."

"I have asked Mother Jenks to dine with us at seven-thirty this evening, and have ordered a carriage to call for her. When she comes I'll tell her everything; then, if she wishes to stay ashore, let her. She's been through more than one such fracas and doesn't mind them at all, I dare say."

And in this Webster was right. Mother Jenks

listened in profound silence, nodding her approval, as Webster related to her the story of the advent in the country of Ricardo Ruey and his plans, but without revealing the identity of Andrew Bowers.

At the conclusion of his recital the old publican merely said: "Gor' bli' me!"

After a silence she added: "My sainted 'Enery used to s'y the proper hodds for a white man in a bally row o' this nature was forty to one. 'The spiggoty,' says 'e, shoots from 'is 'ip, but the wisitin' brother's spent 'is 'prenticeship at the butts some-w'ere or other an' 'as bloomin' well learned to sight an' 'old his breath 'arf in an' 'arf out when 'e pulls. Gor', but how my sainted 'Enery would henjoy bein' 'ere this night to 'elp with the guns." She sighed.

"How about a little bottle of wine to drink peace to your sainted Henry and luck to The Cause?" Webster suggested.

"That's wot I calls talkin'," Mother Jenks responded promptly, and Webster, gazing reflectively at the old lady's beard, wondered why she had not been born a man.

Dolores, fearful for her benefactor's safety, urged Mother Jenks to accompany them out aboard *La Estrellita*, but the old dame indignantly refused, and when pressed for a reason gave it with the utmost frankness: "They'll be tykin' Sarros, an' when they tyke 'im they'll back him ag'in the same wall he backed my sainted 'Enery and your father against, my dear. I've a notion that your father's son'll let Mrs. Colonel 'Enery Jenks come to the party."

At ten o'clock Webster accompanied Mother Jenks home in the carriage, which he dismissed at El Buen Amigo—with instructions to return to the hotel while he continued afoot down the Calle San Rosario to the bay, where Leber's huge corrugated-iron warehouse loomed darkly above high-water mark. If there was light within, it was not visible, but Webster, pausing and listening at one corner of the great structure, could hear the confused murmur of many voices, with an occasional hearty oath in English rising above the murmur.

He slipped along in the deep shadow of the warehouse wall and out on the end of the little dock, where he satisfied himself that Leber's launch was at its moorings; then he went back to the warehouse and whistled softly, whereupon a man crawled out from under the structure and approached him. It was Don Juan Cafetéro.

"They're all inside," he whispered and laid finger on lip. "A lad came down at eight o'clock, took Leber's launch an' wint out to the steamer afther thim. They got in half an hour ago, an' divil a sowl the wiser save meself."

"Thank you, John. Now that I know the coast is clear and the launch ready, I'll go back to the hotel for Miss Ruey."

"Very well, sor," Don Juan replied, and crawled back under the warehouse.

Half an hour later the sound of hoofbeats warned him of the approach of Webster and Dolores in a carriage, and he came forth, loaded in the launch

such baggage as they had been enabled to bring, and held the gunwale of the boat while his passengers stepped aboard.

While Don Juan cast off the painter, Webster primed the motor and turned it over; with a snort it started, and under Webster's guidance the launch backed swiftly out into the bay, where Don Juan lighted the side-lights and riding-light, and loafed off into the darkness.

About a half a mile off shore Webster throttled down the motor until the launch barely made steerage way. "It would never do to go aboard the steamer *before* the fracas started ashore," he explained to Dolores. "That would indicate a guilty knowledge of coming events, and in the event of disaster to the rebel arms it is just possible Señor Sarros might have pull enough, if he hears of our flight six hours in advance of hostilities, to take us off the steamer and ask us to explain. So we'll just cruise slowly around and listen; the attack will come just before dawn; then shortly thereafter we can scurry out to the steamer and be welcomed aboard for the sake of the news we bring."

She did not answer, and Webster knew her thoughts were out where the arc-lights on the outskirts of Buenaventura met the open country—out where the brother she could scarcely remember and whom, until a month previous, she had believed dead, would shortly muster his not too numerous followers.

In the darkness Webster could hear the click of her beads as she prayed; on the turtle deck forward

Don Juan Cafetéro sprawled, thinking perchance of his unlovely past and wondering what effect the events shortly to transpire ashore would have on his future. He wished Webster would relent and offer him a drink some time within the next twenty-four hours. In times of excitement like the present a man needs a drop to brace him up.

Five times the launch slipped lazily down the harbour along the straggling two mile water-front; five times it loafed back. The moon, which was in the first quarter, sank. For the hundredth time Don Juan Cafetéro chanted dolorously "The Death of Sarsfield" and the tuneful glories of the late O'Donnel Abu—and then to Webster's alert ear there floated across the still waters the sound of a gentle purring—the music of an auto-truck. He set the launch in toward Leber's little dock, and presently they saw the door of Leber's warehouse open. Men with lanterns streamed forth, lighting the way for others who bore between them heavy burdens.

"They're emplacing the machine guns in the motor-truck," he whispered to Dolores. "We will not have to wait long now. It's nearly four o'clock."

Again they backed out into the bay until they could see far out over the sleeping city to the hills beyond in the west. Presently along the side of those hills the headlight of a locomotive crept, dropping swiftly down grade until it disappeared in the lowlands.

A half-hour passed; then to the south of the city a rocket flared skyward; almost instantly another flared from the west, followed presently by a murmur,

scarcely audible, as of a muffled snare drum, punctuated presently by a louder, sharper, insistent *puck-puck-puck-puck* that, had Webster but known it, was the bark of a Maxim-Vickers rapid-fire gun throwing a stream of shells into the cantonments of the government troops on the fringe of the city.

Webster's pulse quickened. He was possessed of that feeling which actuates a small boy to follow the fire-engines. "There goes the 'tillery to the south, sor," Don Juan called, and even as he spoke, a shell burst gloriously over the government palace, the white walls of which were already looming over the remainder of the city, now faintly visible in the approaching dawn.

"That was to awaken our friend Sarros," Webster cried. "I'll bet a buffalo nickel that woke the old horsethief up. There's another—and another."

The uproar swelled, the noise gradually drifting around the city from west to south, forming, seemingly, a semicircle of sound. "The government troops are up and doing now," Webster observed, and speeded up his motor. "I think it high time we played the part of frightened refugees. When that machine-gun company with its infantry escort starts up through the city from Leber's warehouse it may encounter early opposition—and I've heard that Mauser bullets kill at three miles. Some strays may drop out here in the bay."

He speeded the launch toward *La Estrellita*, and as the craft scraped in alongside the great steamer's companion landing, her skipper ran down the ladder

to greet them and inquire eagerly of the trend of events ashore.

"We left in a hurry the instant it started," Webster explained. "As Americans, we didn't figure we had any interest in that scrap, either way." He handed Dolores out on the landing stage, tossed their baggage after her and followed; Don Juan took the wheel, and the launch slid out and left them there.

At the head of the companion ladder Webster paused and turned for another look at Buenaventura. To the west three great fires now threw a lurid light skyward, mocking an equally lurid light to the east, that marked the approach of daylight. He smiled. "Those are the cantonment barracks burning," he whispered to Dolores. "Ricardo is keeping his word. He's driving the rats back into their own holes."

CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

THE weeks of clean living, of abstention from his wonted daily alcoholic ration, had inspired in Don Juan Cafetéro a revival of his all but defunct interest in life; conversely, in these stirring times, he was sensible of an equally acute interest in Sobrantean politics, for he was Irish; and flabby indeed is that son of the Green Little Isle who, wherever he may be, declines to take a hand in any public argument. For the love of politics, like the love of home, is never dead in the Irish. It is instinct with them—the heritage, perhaps, of centuries of oppression and suppression, which nurtures rather than stifles the yearning for place and power. Now as Don Juan turned Leber's launch shoreward and kicked the motor wide open, he, too, descried against the dawn the glare of the burning cantonments west of the city, and at the sight his pulse beat high with the lust of battle, the longing to be in at the death in this struggle, where the hopes and aspirations of those he loved were at stake.

Two months previously a revolution would have been a matter of extreme indifference to Don Juan; he would have reflected that it was merely the outs trying to get in, and that if they succeeded, the sole benefit to the general public would be the privilege

of paying the bill. It was all very well, perhaps, to appoint a new *jefe politico*, if only for the sake of diversion, but new or old they "jugged" or booted Don Juan Cafetéro impartially from time to time; the lowliest peon could shoulder the derelict off the narrow sidewalks, while the policeman on the beat looked on and grinned. Consequently, drunk or sober, Don Juan would not have fought with or for a Sobrantean, since he knew from experience that either line of activity was certain to prove unprofitable. To-day, however, in the knowledge that he had an opportunity to fight beside white men and perchance even up some old scores with the *Guardia Civil*, it occurred suddenly to Don Juan that it would be a brave and virtuous act to cast his lot with the Ruey forces. He was a being reorganized and rebuilt, and it behooved him to do something to demonstrate his manhood.

Don Juan knew, of course, that should the rebels lose and he be captured, he would be executed; yet this contingency seemed a far-fetched one, in view of the fact that he had John Stuart Webster at his back, ready to finance his escape from the city. Also Don Juan had had an opportunity, in the hills above San Miguel de Padua, for a critical study of Ricardo Ruey and had come to the conclusion that at last a real man had come to liberate Sobrante; further, Don Juan had had ocular evidence that John Stuart Webster was connected with the revolution, for had he not smuggled Ruey into the country? It was something to be the right-hand man of the president of

a rich little country like Sobrante; it was also something to be as close to that right-hand man as Don Juan was to his master, Webster; consequently self-interest and his sporting code whispered to Don Juan that it behooved him to demonstrate his loyalty with every means at his command, even unto his heart's blood.

"Who knows," he cogitated as the launch bore him swiftly shoreward, "but what I'll acquit meself with honour and get a fine job undher the new administhration? 'Tis the masther's fight, I'm thinkin'; then, be the same token, 'tis John Joseph Cafferty's, win, lose or dhraw; an' may the divil damn me if I fail him afther what he's done for me. Sure, if Gineral Ruey wins, a crook av the masther's finger will make me *jefe politico*. An' if he does—hoo-roo! Hoo-ray!"

With his imagination still running riot, Don Juan made the launch fast to the little dock, down which he ran straight for the warehouse, where the Ruey mercenaries were still congregated, busily wiping the factory-grease from the weapons which had just been distributed to them from the packing-cases. A sharp voice halted him, he paused, panting, to find himself looking down the long blue barrel of a service pistol.

"Who are you, and what are you doing here?" the man behind the weapon demanded brusquely.

"I'm Private John J. Cafferty, the latest recruit to the Ruey army," Don Juan answered composedly. "Who did ye think I was? Private secreth'ry to that divil Sarros? Man, dear, lower that gun av

yours, for God knows I'm nervous enough as it is. Have ye somethin' ye could give me to fight wit,' *avic ?*"

The man who had challenged him—a lank, swarthy individual from the Mexican border—looked him over with twinkling eyes. "You'll do, Cafferty, old-timer," he drawled, "and if you don't, you'll wish you had. There's a man for every rifle just now, but I wouldn't be surprised if there'd be a right smart more rifles than men before a great while. Help yourself to the gun o' the first man that goes down; in the meantime, hop into that there truck and keep the cartridge belt for the machine guns full up. You're just in time."

Without further ado Don Juan climbed into the truck. A little citadel of sheet steel had been built around the driver's seat, with a narrow slit in front through which the latter peered out. The body of the truck had been boxed in with the same material and housed two machine guns, emplaced, and a crew of half a dozen men crouched on the floor, busily engaged in loading the belts. Four motor bicycles, with sturdy, specially built side-cars attached, and a machine gun in each side-car, were waiting near by, together with a half-dozen country carts loaded with ammunition cases and drawn by horses.

"How soon do we start?" Don Juan demanded anxiously, as he crowded in beside one of his new-found comrades.

"I believe," this individual replied in the unmistakable accents of an Oxford man, "that the plan is

to wait until five o'clock; by that time all the government troops that can be spared from the arsenal and palace will have been dispatched to the fighting now taking place west of the city. Naturally, the government forces aren't anticipating an attack from the rear, and so they will, in all probability, weaken their base. I believe that eases our task; certainly it will save us many men."

Don Juan nodded his entire approval to this shrewd plan of campaign and fell to stuffing cartridges in the web belting, the while he whistled softly, unmusically, and with puffing, hissing sounds between his snaggle teeth, until a Sobrantean gentleman (it was Doctor Pacheco) came out of the warehouse and gave the order to proceed.

They moved out silently, the Sobrantean rebels falling into line behind the auto-truck, the motorcycle battery, and the transport-carts, all of which were in charge of the machine gun company. They marched along the water-front for four blocks and then turned up a side street, which happened to be the Calle de Concordia, thus enabling Mother Jenks, who was peering from the doorway of El Buen Amigo, to see them coming.

"Hah!" she muttered. "'Enery, they're comin'. The worm is turnin', 'Enery; fifteen years you've wyted for vengeance, my love, but to-d'y you'll get it."

She waddled out into the street and held up her hand in a gesture as authoritative and imperious as that of a traffic officer. "Batter-r-ry 'alt!" she

croaked. She had heard the late 'Enery give that command often enough to have acquired the exact inflection necessary to make an impression upon men accustomed to obeying such a command whenever given. Instinctively the column slowed up; some of the Foreign Legion, old coast-artillerists, no doubt, came to a halt with promptness and precision; all stared at Mother Jenks.

"Ow about 'arf a dozen cases o' good brandy for the wounded?" Mother Jenks suggested. "An' 'ow about a bally old woman for a Red Cross nurse?"

"You're on, ma'am," the foreign leader replied promptly, and translated the old lady's suggestion to Doctor Pacheco, who accepted gracefully and thanked Mother Jenks in purest Castilian. So a detail of six men was told off to carry the six cases of brandy out of El Buen Amigo and load them on the ammunition carts; then Mother Jenks crawled up into the armoured truck with the machine-gun crew, and the column once more took up its line of rapid march.

The objective of this unsuspected force within the city was, as Ricardo Ruey shrewdly suspected it might be, poorly garrisoned. Usually a force of fully five hundred men was stationed at the national arsenal, but the sharp, savage attack from the west, so sudden and unexpected, had thrown Sarros into a panic and left him no time to plan his defence carefully. His first thought had been to send all his available forces to support the troops bearing the brunt of the rebel attack, and it was tremendously important that this should be done very promptly,

in view of the lack of information concerning the numerical force of the enemy; consequently he had reduced the arsenal force to one hundred men and retained only his favorite troop of the Guards and one company of the Fifteenth Infantry to protect the palace.

Acting under hastily given telephonic orders, the commanding officer at the cantonment barracks had detailed a few hundred men to fight a rear-guard action while the main army fell back in good order behind a railway embankment which swept in a wide arc around the city and offered an excellent substitute for breastworks. This position had scarcely been attained before the furious advance of the rebels drove in the rear guard, and pending the capture of the arsenal, Ricardo realized his operations were at an *impasse*. Promptly he dug himself in, and the battle developed into a brisk affair of give and take, involving meagre losses to both factions but an appalling wastage of ammunition.

The arsenal, a large, modern concrete building with tremendously thick walls reinforced by steel, would have offered fairly good resistance to the average field battery. Surrounding it on all four sides was a reinforced concrete wall thirty feet high, with machine-gun bastions at each corner and a platform along the wall, inside and twenty-five feet from the ground, which afforded foot room for infantry which could use the top five feet of the wall for protection while firing over it. There was but one entrance, a heavy, barred steel gate which was always

kept locked when it was not necessary to have it opened for ingress or egress. Given warning of an attack and with sufficient time to prepare for it, one hundred of the right sort of fighting men could withstand an indefinite siege by a force not provided with artillery heavier than an ordinary field gun. With a full realization of this, therefore, Ricardo and his confrères had designed to accomplish by strategy that which could not be done by the limited forces at their command.

The tread of marching men, the purr of the motorcycles and the armoured truck, during the progress of the invaders up the Calle de Concordia, aroused the dwellers in that thoroughfare. Those who appeared in their doorways, however, as promptly disappeared upon recognizing this indubitable evidence of local disturbance. As the column approached the neighbourhood of the arsenal, three detachments broke away from the main body and disappeared down side streets, to turn at right angles later and march parallel with the main command. Each of these detachments was accompanied by one unit of the motorcycle-mounted machine-gun battery with its white crew; two blocks beyond the arsenal square each detachment leader so disposed his men as to offer spirited resistance to any sortie that might be made by the troops from the palace in the hope of driving off the attackers of the arsenal.

Having thus provided for protection during its operations, the main body nominally under Doctor Pacheco but in reality commanded by the chief of the

machine-gun company, proceeded to operate. With the utmost assurance in the world the armoured truck rolled down the street to the arsenal entrance, swung in and pointed its impudent nose straight at the iron bars while the hidden chauffeur called loudly and profanely in Spanish upon the sentry to open the gate and let him in—that there was necessity for great hurry, since he had been sent down from the palace by the *presidente* himself, for machine guns to equip this armoured motor-car. The sentry immediately called the officer of the guard, who peered out, observed nothing but the motor-truck, which seemed far from dangerous, and without further ado inserted a huge key in the lock and turned the bolt. The sentry swung the double gates ajar, and with a prolonged and raucous toot of its horn the big car loafed in. The sentry closed the gate again, while the officer stepped up to turn the key in the lock. Instead, he died with half a dozen pistol bullets through his body, while the sentry sprawled beside him.

The prolonged toot of the motor-horn had been the signal agreed upon to apprise the detachment waiting in a secluded back street that the truck was inside the arsenal wall. With a yell they swept out of the side street and down on the gate, through which they poured into the arsenal grounds. At sound of the first shot at the gate, the *comandante* of the garrison, which had been drawn up in double rank for reveille roll call, realized he was attacked and that swift measures were necessary. Fortu-

nately for him, his men were standing at attention at the time, preparatory to receiving from him one of those ante-battle exhortations so dear to the Latin soul.

A sharp command, and the little garrison had fixed bayonets; another command, and they were in line of squads; before the auto-truck could be swung sideways to permit a machine gun to play on the Sobranteans in close formation, the latter had thrown out a skirmish line and were charging; while from the guardhouse window, just inside the gate, a volley, poured into the unprotected rear of the truck following its passage through the gate, did deadly execution. The driver, a bullet through his back, sagged forward into his steel-clad citadel; both machine-gun operators were wounded, and the truck was stalled. The situation was desperate.

"I'm a gone goose," mourned Don Juan Cafetéro, and he leaped from the shambles to the ground, with some hazy notion of making his escape through the gate. He was too late. Two men, riding tandem on a motorcycle with a machine gun in the specially constructed side-car, appeared in the entrance and leaped off; almost before Don Juan had time to dodge behind the motor-truck to escape possible wild bullets, the machine gun was sweeping the on-coming skirmish line. Don Juan cheered as man after man of the garrison pitched on his face, for the odds were rapidly being evened now, greatly to the pleasure of the men charging through the gate to support the machine gun. Out into the arsenal

yard they swept, forcing the machine-gun crew to cease firing because of the danger of killing their own men; with a shock bayonet met bayonet in the centre of the yard, and the issue was up for prompt and final decision.

Don Juan's Hibernian blood thrilled; he cast about for a weapon in this emergency, and his glance rested on the body of the dead officer beside the gate. To possess himself of the latter's heavy "cut-and-thrust" sword was the work of seconds, and with a royal good will Don Juan launched himself into the heart of the scrimmage. He had a hazy impression that he was striking and stabbing, that others were striking and stabbing at him, that men crowded and breathed and pressed and swore and grunted around him, that the fighting-room was no better than it might have been but was rapidly improving. Then the gory fog lifted, and Doctor Pacheco had Don Juan by the hand; they stood together in the arsenal entrance, and the little Doctor was explaining to the war-mad Don Juan that all was over in so far as the arsenal was concerned—the survivors of the garrison having surrendered—that now, having the opportunity, he, Doctor Pacheco, desired to thank Don Juan Cafetéro for his life. Don Juan looked at him amazedly, for he hadn't the slightest idea what the Doctor was talking about. He spat, gazed around at the litter of corpses on the arsenal lawn, and nodded his red head approvingly.

In an incredibly short space of time the news that the arsenal had been captured and that Sarros was

besieged in the palace spread through the city. The sight of the red banner of revolution floating over the arsenal for the first time in fifteen years brought hundreds of willing recruits to the rebel ranks, as Ricardo Ruey had anticipated; these were quickly supplied with arms and ammunition; by ten o'clock a battalion had been formed and sent off, together with the machine-gun company, to connect with the San Bruno contingent advancing from the south to turn the flank of the government troops, while the equipping of an additional battalion proceeded within the arsenal. As fast as the new levies were armed, they were hurried off to reinforce the handful of white men who had, after clearing the arsenal, advanced on the palace and now, with machine guns from the arsenal commanding all avenues of escape from the trap wherein Sarros found himself, were calmly awaiting developments, merely keeping an eye open for snipers.

Thus the forenoon passed away. By one o'clock Don Juan Cafetéro—who in the absence of close-range fighting had elected himself ordnance sergeant—passed out the last rifle and ammunition. He was red with slaughter, slippery with gun-grease, dripping with perspiration and filthy with dust and dirt. "Begorra," he declared, "a cowld bottle av beer would go fine now." Then, recalling his limitations, he sighed and put the thought from him. It revived in him, however, for the first time since he had left the steamer, a memory of John Stuart Webster, and his promise to the latter to report on the progress

of the war. So Don Juan sought Doctor Pacheco in his headquarters and learned that a signal-man, heliographing from the roof of the arsenal, had been in communication with General Ruey, who reported the situation well in hand, with no doubt of an overwhelming victory before the day should be over. This and sundry other bits of information Don Juan gleaned and then deserted the Sobrantean revolutionary army quite as casually as he had joined it, to make his precarious way down the Calle San Rosario to the bay.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

THROUGHOUT the forenoon Webster and Dolores, from the deck of the steamer, watched the city. Numerous fires covered it with a pall of smoke from beneath which came the steady crackle of machine-gun fire, mingled with the insistent crash of the field batteries which seemingly had moved up closer to their target.

By ten o'clock the sounds of battle had swelled to a deeper, steadier roar, and refugees arriving brought various and fragmentary stories of the fighting. From this hodge-podge of misinformation, however, Webster decided that Ricardo's troops were forcing the issue with vim and determination, and since the most furious fighting was now well in toward the heart of the city, it seemed reasonable to presume the struggle was for possession of the arsenal and palace.

At noon the deep diapason of conflict began to slacken; by one o'clock it had dwindled considerably, and at two o'clock Webster, gazing anxiously cityward, observed Leber's launch coming rapidly out from shore. At the wheel stood Don Juan Cafetéro; as the launch shot in under the vessel's side he looked up, searching for Webster's face among the curious throng that lined the rail.

"Faugh-a-ballagh!" he shrieked. "We've got the

divils cornered now. 'Twill be over two hours hince."

"Who has won?" a voice called, and another, evidently a humourist and a shrewd judge of human nature, replied: "Why ask foolish questions? The rebels, of course. That fellow's Irish and the Irish are born rebels. Look at the scoundrel. He's black with gun-grease and burned powder where he isn't red with blood. The butcher!"

Don Juan tied up the launch at the gangway and leaped up the ladder, three steps at a time. "Glory be to God," he panted and hurled himself into Webster's arms. "I was in it! I was. I got back in time to catch up wit' the lads at the warehouse an' they were the fine, fightin' divils, I'll gamble you. Och, 'twas a grrand bit av a fight—whilst it lasted. They put me in the motor-thruck, loadin' the belts wit' ca'tridges as fast as the gunners imptied thim, but faith they couldn't keep me there. I got into the heart av the scrimmage in the yard av the arsenal an' faith 'twas well for that little Docthor Pacheco I did. 'Twas wurrk to me likin'. I'd a machete——"

"You bloodthirsty scoundrel!" Webster shook the war-mad son of Erin. "I told you not to mix in it, but to hang around on the fringe of the fight, and bring us early news. Suppose you'd been killed? Who would have come for us then? Didn't I tell you we had a dinner engagement in the palace?"

"Me on the fringes av a fight," sputtered Don Juan, amazed and outraged. "Take shame for yer-

self, sor. There was niver the likes av me hung around the fringes av a fight, an' well ye know it."

"I'm amazed that you even remembered your instructions," Webster rasped at him.

"Sure, our division had cl'aned up nicely an' I had nothin' else to do, God bless ye. They were besiegin' the palace whin I left, an' small chance av takin' it for a couple av hours; what fightin' there was on the outside was shtreet shootin'—an' not to me likin'."

"Is it quite safe to bring Miss Ruey ashore, John?"

"'Tis safe enough at the Hotel Mateo. We have the city for half a mile beyant, in the rear av them—an' they're not fightin' to get to the bay. The Guards an' some av the Fifteenth Infanthry regimint are in the palace an' the *cuartel* close by, an' thim that we failed to get in the arsenal have j'ined thim. But the bulk av the Sarros army is thryin' to break t'rough to the south an' west, to get to the hills. D'ye mind the spur thrack that runs in a semi-cirrcle around the city? Well, thin, the rebels are behint the embankmint, takin' it aisy. Have no worry, sor. Whin we've took the palace we'll move on an' dhrive the vagabones from behint up to that railroad embankmint, where *Gineral* Ruey can bid them the time av day."

Webster turned to Dolores. "Do you wish to go ashore?"

She nodded, her flashing eyes bent in admiration upon the gory, grimy Don Juan Cafetéro, for she was

half Irish, and in that amazing meeting she knew the outcast for one of her blood. "I think my brother will sleep in his father's old room to-night," she murmured softly. "And I would sleep in mine."

They followed Don Juan down the gangway to the launch and sped back to the city. The door of Leber's warehouse stood wide open; within was a litter of greasy rags and broken packing cases, with Leber, quite mystified, sitting on a keg of nails and staring curiously at it all.

Guided by Don Juan Cafetéro, Webster and Dolores passed on up the Calle San Rosario. Occasionally a bullet, fired two or three miles to the west, droned lazily overhead or dropped with a sharp metallic sound on the corrugated-iron roofs of a building. At the hotel the proprietor alone was in evidence, seated behind the desk smoking in profound indifference.

In response to Webster's eager inquiries for the latest news from the front, the placid fellow shrugged and murmured: "*Quien sabe?*" Evidently for him such stirring scenes had long since lost their novelty; the bloom was off the peach, as it were.

Webster went upstairs and helped himself to another automatic and several spare clips of shells which he had left in his trunk. On his return to the lobby, Dolores saw what a very near sighted person, indeed, would have seen—to wit: that he was not pleased to remain in the hotel and with the spirit of adventure strong within him was desirous of progressing still farther toward the firing, in the hope

of eliciting some favourable news as to the progress of the fight. She realized, however, that he would do his duty and remain with her in the hotel; so she said gaily:

"Suppose we walk out a little farther, Caliph. Many of the side streets will be as safe and peaceful as one could desire, and if warfare should develop in our vicinity we can step into some house."

"I do not like to have you run the slightest risk——" he began, but she pooh-poohed him into silence, took him by the arm with a great air of camaraderie, and declared they should go forth to adventure—but cautiously.

Webster glanced at Don Juan. "We can go a half or three quarters av a mile out the Calle San Rosario, sor," the Irishman answered. "After that 'twill not be a pleasant sight for the young leddy—an' there may be some shootin'. Squads av the governmint throops took refuge in the houses an' took to snipin'. 'Twill be shlow wurrk roundin' the last av thim up. Even afther the fight is over, there'll be scatterin' shootin' scrapes all av the night long, I'm thinkin'."

"At the slightest danger we'll turn back," Webster announced, and with Don Juan Cafetéro scouting the way a block in advance they progressed slowly toward the centre of the disturbance.

Soon they passed a horse dead in the middle of the street; a little farther on one of the machine-gun company, a lank Texan, sat on the curb rolling a cigarette with his left hand. He had a bullet through

his right shoulder and another through the calf of his left leg and had received no first aid attention; the flies were bothering him considerably and he was cursing softly and fluently, like the ex-mule-skinner he was.

Farther on another white invader lay face down in the gutter; for him the fight had ended almost ere it had begun. In the next block half a dozen sandal-footed Sobranteans, in the blue and red-trimmed uniform of the *Guardia Civil*, lay spawled in uncouth attitudes, where the first blast of a machine gun had caught them as they rushed out of the police station to repel the advancing mercenaries.

Seeing that the main street of the city would assume even a more grisly aspect the longer they followed it, Don Juan led Webster and Dolores a couple of blocks down a cross-street and turned out into the Calle de Hernandez, parallel to the Calle San Rosario. There had been no shooting in this street, apparently; as they proceeded not even a stray bullet whined down the silent calle.

Four blocks from the government palace, however, they found the narrow sidewalks of this quiet street lined with wounded from both sides, with a doctor and half a dozen of Ricardo's hired fighters ministering to them; as they threaded their way between the recumbent figures they came upon Mother Jenks, brandy bottle and glass in hand, "doing her bit."

"Hah! So here you are, my lamb," she greeted Dolores. "Right-o. Just where yer ought to be, Gor' bless yer sweet face. Let these poor misfor-

tunate lads see that the sister o' the new president ain't too proud to care for 'em. 'Ere, lass. 'Old up the 'ead o' this young cockerel with the 'ole in 'is neck. 'Ere, lad. Tyke a brace now! 'Ere's some o' your own people, not a lot o' bloomin' yeller-bellies, come to put something else in yer neck—somethink that'll stimulate yer "

The "young cockerel," a blond youth of scarce twenty summers, twisted his head and grinned up at Dolores as she knelt beside him to lift him up. "Here, here, sister," he mumbled, "you'll get that white dress dirty. Never mind me. It's just a flesh wound, only my neck has got stiff and I'm weak from loss of blood."

Mother Jenks winked at Webster as she set a glass of brandy to the stricken adventurer's lips. "Give me a bit o' the white meat, as my sainted 'Enery used to s'y," she murmured comically.

Dolores looked up at Webster. "I'll stay here," she said simply. "I've found a job helping Mother Jenks. You and Don Juan may run along if you wish. I know you're as curious as children."

They were. It would have been impossible for any man with red corpuscles in his blood to harken to the shooting and shouts only three city blocks distant without yearning to see the fight itself.

"I'll return in fifteen minutes, at the latest," he promised her, and with Don Juan Cafetéro, who had helped himself to a rifle and bayonet from one of the wounded, he turned the corner into the next street and started back toward the Calle San Rosario,

which they followed west through a block plentifully sprinkled with the dead of both factions.

Don Juan led the way through an alley in the rear of the Catedral de la Santa Cruz to the door of the sacristy; as he placed his hand on the latch three rifle bullets struck around them, showering them with fragments of falling adobe.

"There's a house party in the neighbourhood," yelled Don Juan and darted into the church, with Webster at his heels, just in time to escape another fusillade. They walked through the sacristy and passed through a door into the great cathedral, with its high, carved, Gothic-arched ceiling. Through the thick closed doors of the main entrance, lost in the dimness of space out in front, the sounds of the battle half a block away seemed very distant, indeed.

They passed the altar and Don Juan genuflected and crossed himself reverently. "I'll be afther makin' me confession," he whispered to Webster. "Wait for me, sor."

He leaned his rifle against the altar railing, crossed the church and touched lightly on the shoulder a monk kneeling in prayer before the altar of the Virgin; the latter bent his head while Don Juan whispered; then he rose and both went into the confessional, while Webster found a bench along the wall and waited.

Presently Don Juan came forth, knelt on the red-tiled floor and prayed—something, Webster suspected, he had not done for quite a while. And when he had finished his supplication and procured his

rifle, Webster joined him, the monk unbolted the door and from the quiet of the house of God they passed out into the street and the tumult of hell.

"I've been clost to death this day," Don Juan explained, "an' the day is not done. Be the same token, 'tis long since I'd made me last confession; sure, until you picked me out av the mire, sor, 'tis little thought I had for the hereafter."

They were standing on the steps of the cathedral as Don Juan spoke, and from their place they could see a dozen or more of Ricardo's hired fighters crouched under the shelter of the palace walls across the street. "I think we'll be safer there," Webster cried, as a couple of bullets struck the stone steps at their feet and ricocheted against the cathedral door. "That rifle of yours is making you a marked man, Don Juan."

They ran across the street and joined the men under the palace wall.

"What's this?" Don Juan demanded briskly. "Have ye not shmoked thim out yet?"

"Noddings doing," a young German answered. "Der chief has sent word dot we shall not artillery use on der balace. Men all aroundt it we haf, mit a machine gun commanding each gate; most of der poys have chust moved out west in der rear of der government troops."

"Then," Don Juan declared with conviction, "there'll be no fighting here to speak av, until later."

"Der is blenty of choy hunting snipers, *mein freund.* Der houses hereabouts vos filled mit dem."

"I'll have no cat fights in mine," Don Juan retorted. "Come wit' me, sor, an' we'll be in at the death out beyant at the railroad embankmint."

"Too late," Webster answered, for on the instant to the west the crackle of rifle and machine-gun fire interluded with the staccato barks of a Maxim-Vickers broke out, swelling almost immediately to a steady outpouring of sound. "We'll stay here where we're safe for the finals. When General Ruey has cleaned up out there he'll come here to take command."

For half an hour the sounds of a brisk engagement to the west did not slacken; then with disconcerting suddenness the uproar died away fully 50 per cent.

"They're going in with the bayonet and machetes," somebody who knew remarked laconically. "Wait and you'll hear the cheering."

They waited fully ten minutes, but presently, as the firing gradually died away, they heard it, faint and indistinguishable at first, but gradually coming nearer. And presently the trapped men in the palace heard it, too. "Viva Ruey! Viva! Viva Ruey!"

"All over but the shouting," Don Juan remarked disgustedly. "The lads in the palace will surrindher now. Sure Gineral Ruey was right afther all. For why should he shoot holes in the house he's goin' to live in, an' where, be the same token, he gives a dinner party this night?"

"I'm glad the end is in sight," Webster replied. "We have no interest in this revolution, John, and

it isn't up to us to horn in on the play; yet if it went against the Ruey faction, I fear we'd be forced into active service in spite of ourselves. There is such a thing as fighting to save one's skin, you know."

Don Juan laughed pleasurably. "What a shame we missed the row out beyant at the railroad embankmint," he declared.

"I wish you'd kept out of it, Don Juan. What business had you in the fight at the *cuartel?* Suppose you'd been killed?"

"Small loss!" Don Juan retorted.

"I should have mourned you nevertheless, John."

"Would you that same?" Don Juan's buttermilk eyes lighted with affection and pleasure. "Would it put a pang in the heart of you, sor, to see me stretched?"

"Yes, it would, John. You're a wild, impulsive, lunatic, worthless Irishman, but there's a broad vein of pay-ore in you, and I want you to live until I can develop it. When Mr. Geary returns to operate the mine, he'll need a foreman he can trust."

"And do you trust me, sor?"

"I do indeed, John. By the way, you never gave me your word of honour to cut out red liquor for keeps. Up till to-day I've had to watch you—and I don't want to do that. It isn't dignified for either of us, and from to-day on you must be a man or a mouse. If you prove yourself a man, I want you in my business; if you prove yourself a mouse, somebody else may have you. How about you, John? The *cantinas* will be open to-night, and firewater will

be free to the soldiers of the new republic. Must I watch you to-night?"

Don Juan shook his reckless red head. "I'll never let a drop of liquor cross my lips without your permission, sor," he promised simply. "I am the man and you are the master."

"We'll shake hands on that!" After the western habit of validating all verbal agreements with a handshake, Webster thrust his hard hand out to his man, who took it in both of his and held it for half a minute. He wanted to speak, but couldn't; he could only bow his head as his eyes clouded with the tears of his appreciation. "Ah, sor," he blurted presently, "I'd die for ye an' welcome the chanst."

A wild yell of alarm broke out in the next block, at the north gate of the palace; there was a sudden flurry of rifle fire and cries of "Here they come! Stop them! Stop them! They're breaking out!"

Without awaiting orders the hired fighters along the wall—some fifteen of them—leaped out into the street, forming a skirmish line, just as a troop of cavalry, with drawn sabres, swept around the corner and charged upon the devoted little line. "Sarros must be thryin' to make his get-away," Don Juan Cafetéro remarked coolly, and emptied a saddle. "They threw open the big palace gate, an' the Guards are clearin' a way for him to the bay." He emptied another saddle.

In the meantime Ricardo's fire-eaters had not been idle. The instant the Guards turned into the street a deadly magazine fire had been opened on

them. They had already suffered heavily winning through the gate and past the besiegers in front of it, but once they turned the corner into the next street they had the fire of but a handful of men to contend with. Nevertheless it was sufficiently deadly. Many of the horses in the front rank went down with their riders, forcing the maddened animals behind to clear their carcasses by leaping over them, which some did. Many, however, tripped and stumbled in their wild gallop, spilling their riders.

"Stay by the wall, you madman," Webster ordered. "There'll be enough left to ride down those men in the street and sabre them!"

And there were! They died to a man, and the sadly depleted troop of Guards galloped on, leaving Don Juan and Webster unscathed on the sidewalk, the only two living men unhurt in that shambles.

Not for long, however, did they have the street to themselves. Around the corner of the palace wall a limousine, with the curtains drawn, swung on two wheels, skidded, struck the carcass of a horse and turned over, catapulting the chauffeur into the middle of the street.

"Sarros!" shrieked Don Juan and ran to the overturned vehicle. It was quite empty.

"Bully boy, Señor Sarros," Webster laughed. "He's turned a pretty trick, hasn't he? Sent his Guards out to hack a pathway for an empty limousine! That means he's hoping to draw the watchers from the other gate!"

But Don Juan Cafetéro was not listening; he was

running at top speed for the south gate of the palace grounds—and Webster followed.

As they swung into the street upon which this south gate opened, Webster saw that it was deserted of all save the dead, for Sarros's clever ruse had worked well and had had the effect of arousing the curiosity of his enemies as to the cause of the uproar at the north gate, in consequence of which they had all scurried around the block to see what they could see, thus according Sarros the thing he desired most—a fighting chance and a half minute to get through the gate and headed for the steamship landing without interference.

Webster and Don Juan came abreast the high, barred gate in the thick, twenty-foot masonry wall as the barrier swung back and a man, in civilian clothes, thundered through on a magnificent bay thoroughbred.

"That's him. Shtop the divil!" screamed Don Juan. "They'll do the decent thing be me if I take him alive."

To Webster, who had acquired the art of snap shooting while killing time in many a lonely camp, the bay charger offered an easy mark. "Hate to down that beautiful animal," he remarked—and pulled away.

The horse leaped into the air and came down stiff-legged; Sarros spurred it cruelly, and the gallant beast strove to gather itself into its stride, staggered and sank to its knees, as with a wild Irish yell Don Juan Cafetéro reached the dictator's side.

Sarros drew a revolver, but before he could use it Don Juan tapped him smartly over the head with his rifle barrel, and the man toppled inertly to the ground beside his dying horse.

"More power to ye, sor," Don Juan called cheerily and turned to receive Webster's approval.

What he saw paralyzed him for an instant. Webster was standing beside the gate, firing into a dozen of Sarros's soldiery who were pouring out of a house just across the street, where for an hour they had crouched unseen and unheard by the Ruey men at the gate. They were practically out of ammunition and had merely been awaiting a favourable opportunity to escape before the rebels should enter the city in force and the house-to-house search for snipers should begin. They had been about to emerge and beat a hasty retreat, when Sarros rode out at the gate, and with a rush they followed, gaining the sidewalk in time to be witnesses to the dictator's downfall.

For a moment they had paused, huddled on the sidewalk behind their officer, who, turning to scout the street up and down, beheld John Stuart Webster standing by the gate with an automatic in his hand. At the same instant Webster's attention had been attracted to the little band on the sidewalk; in their leader he recognized no less a personage than his late acquaintance, the fire-eating Captain José Benavides. Coincidently Benavides recognized Webster.

It was an awkward situation. Webster realized the issue was about to be decided, that if he would

Webster planted a bullet in Benavides's abdomen with his first shot, and blew out the duelist's brains with his second

have it in his favour, he should waste not one split-second before killing the mercurial Benavides as the latter stood staring at him. It was not a question, now, of who should beat the other to the draw, for each had already filled his hand. It was a question, rather, as to who should recover first from his astonishment. If Benavides decided to let bygones be bygones and retreat without firing a shot, then Webster was quite willing to permit him to pass unmolested; indeed, such was his aversion to shooting any man, so earnestly did he hope the Sobrantean would consider that discretion was the better part of valour, that he resolved to inculcate that idea in the Hotspur.

"Captain Benavides," he said suavely, "your cause is lost. If you care to escape aboard the steamer, I will see to it that you are not removed from her before she sails; if you care to surrender to me now, I give you my word of honour you will not be executed."

Benavides might have had, and doubtless did have, his faults, but cowardice was not one of them. And he did have the ghost of a sense of humour. An evil smile flitted over his olive features.

"Without taking into consideration the bayonets at my back," he replied, "it strikes me the odds are even now. And yet you patronize me."

Webster was nettled. "I'd rather do that than kill you, Benavides," he retorted. "Don't be a fool. Run along and sell your papers, and take your pitiful little sandal-footed brigands with you. Scat!"

Benavides's hand, holding his pistol, had been hanging loosely at his side. With his furious glance meeting Webster's unfalteringly, with the merest movement of his wrist and scarcely without movement of his forearm, he threw up his weapon and fired. Scarcely a fifth of a second had elapsed between the movement of his wrist and the pressure of his finger on the trigger; Webster, gazing steadily into the sombre eyes, had noted no hint of the man's intention, and was actually caught off his guard.

The bullet tore through his biceps, momentarily paralyzing him, and his automatic dropped clattering to the sidewalk; as he stooped and recovered it, Benavides fired again, creasing the top of his left shoulder. The Sobrantean took aim for a third and finishing shot, but when he pulled the trigger the hammer fell on a defective cartridge, which gave to John Stuart Webster all the advantage he craved. He planted a bullet in Benavides's abdomen with his first shot, blew out the duelist's brains with his second, and whirled to meet the charge of the little sandal-footed *soldados*, who, seeing their leader fallen, had without an instant's hesitation and apparently by mutual consent decided to avenge him.

Webster backed dazedly toward the wall, firing as he did so, but he was too dizzy to shoot effectively, and the semicircle of bayonets closed in on his front. He had wounded three men without stopping them; a second more, and their long, eighteen-inch bayonets would have been in his vitals, when into the midst of the mêlée, from the rear, dashed Don Juan Cafetéro,

shrieking like a fiend and swinging his rifle, which he held grasped by the barrel.

Webster saw a bayonet lunging toward him. He lifted his leg and caught the point on his boot-heel while with his last cartridge he killed the man behind the bayonet, just as the latter's next-rank man thrust straight and true in under the American's left arm, while a third man jabbed at his stomach and got the bayonet home in his hip. These two thrusts, delivered almost simultaneously, by their impact carried their victim backward against the wall, against which his head collided with a smart thud. He fell forward on his face; before his assailants could draw back for a finishing thrust, in case the gringo needed it, which they doubted, Don Juan Cafetéro had brained them both.

Standing above the man he loved, with the latter's body between his outspread legs, Don Juan Cafetéro stood for the final accounting, his buttermilk eyes gleaming hatred and war-madness, his lips drawn back from his snaggle teeth, his breast rising and falling as they closed in around him. For a few seconds he was visible swinging his rifle like a flail, magnificent, unterrified—and then a bayonet slipped in under his guard. It was the end.

With a final great effort that used up the last strength in his drink-corroded muscles he hurled his rifle into the midst of his four remaining enemies. before he swayed and toppled full length on top of Webster, shielding with his poor body the man who had fanned to flame the dying ember of manhood in

the wreck that drink and the devil had cast up on the Caribbean coast.

For Don Juan Cafetéro it had been a long, joyous, thirsty day, but at last the day was done. And in order to make certain, a *soldado* jabbed him once more through the vitals before he fled with the other survivors.

CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX

FOR half an hour after Webster left her to assist the great-hearted Mother Jenks in her rough care of the wounded, Dolores, absorbed in her work of mercy, gave all of her thought to the grim task before her. The cries, followed by the sudden, savage outbreak of fire when the Guards made their dash from the palace, brought Webster and Don Juan to mind instantly. In a quick access of terror and apprehension she clung, trembling, to stolid old Mother Jenks.

"Somebody's breakin' in or breakin' out," the veteran decided calmly. "Come to the corner, dearie, an' 'ave a look."

She half dragged Dolores to the corner, from which they had an unobstructed view down the cross-street to its intersection three blocks distant with the Calle San Rosario; consequently they saw the dozen or more survivors of that ill-fated dash from the north gate of the palace flash for a second across their line of vision. Mother Jenks croaked dismally, like a disreputable old raven; she was trying to cheer.

"The rats are leavin' the sinkin' ship," she wheezed. "Come an' see them tyke the devils as killed my sainted 'Enery." She broke eagerly from Dolores's detaining grasp and ran down the street. Dolores

hesitated a moment; then, reasoning that her duty lay in pursuing Mother Jenks and preventing her from rushing headlong into the conflict, she followed.

Evidently the fleeing Guards had scurried around a corner into a cross-street shortly after Dolores and Mother Jenks had seen them gallop past, for the firing down the Calle San Rosario had ceased entirely by the time they reached it. They stood a moment at the corner, gazing up the street at the dead—man and beast—with the wounded crawling out of the shambles to the sidewalk.

Mother Jenks nodded approvingly as triumphant shouts from the north gate told her the Ruey men were pouring into the palace; with their arms about each other the two women watched and waited—and presently the national flag on the palace came fluttering down from its staff, to be raised again with the red banner of revolution fluttering above it, the insignia of a nation reborn.

"My lamb," Mother Jenks said softly to Dolores, "the war is over. Wot's the matter with goin' in the south gate an' wytin' on the palace steps for the provisional president to make his grand ountray? If we 'esitate five minutes they'll have a bloomin' guard on both gates, arskin' us 'oo we are an' wot we want."

"But Mr. Webster will come to that back street looking for me; I must go back and wait there for him."

"Wyte, nothink!" Mother Jenks overruled the girl's protest roughly. "'E'll 'ave gone into the

palace with the crowd for a look-see; we'll meet 'im there an' syve 'im the trouble o' 'untin' for us. Come!" And she half dragged the shrinking girl toward the gate, a block distant, where only a few minutes before Webster and Don Juan Cafetéro had made their ineffectual stand.

"Don't look at the blighters, honey," Mother Jenks warned Dolores when, in approaching the gate, she caught sight of the bodies strewed in front of it. "My word! Regular bally mess—an' all spiggoties! Cawn't be. Must 'ave been some white meat on this bird, as my sainted 'Enery uster s'y. Hah! Thought so! There's a red-headed 'un! Gawd's truth! An' 'e done all that—Gor' strike me pink! It's Don Juan Cafetéro."

Mother Jenks stepped over the gory corpses ringed around Don Juan and knelt beside him. "Don Juan!" she cried. "You bally, interferin' blighter, you've gone an' got it!"

She ran her strong old arms under his dripping body, lifted him and laid his red head on her knee, while with her free hand she drew a small flask of brandy from her dress pocket.

Don Juan opened his buttermilk eyes and gazed up at her with slowly dawning wonder, then closed them again, drowsily, like a tired child. Mother Jenks pressed the flask to his blue lips; as the brandy bit his tongue he rolled his fiery head in feeble protest and weakly set his teeth against the lip of the flask. Wondering, Mother Jenks withdrew it—and then Don Juan spoke.

"Have ye the masther's permission, *allanah?* I give him me worrd av honour—not—to dhrink—till—he—give—permission. He—was good—to me—troth he was—God—love—me—boss——"

His jaw dropped loosely; his head rolled sideways; but ere his spirit fled, Don Juan Cafetéro had justified the faith of his master. He had kept his word of honour. He had made good on his brag to die for John Stuart Webster and welcome the chance! Mother Jenks held his body a little while, gazing into the face no longer rubicund; then gently she eased it to the ground and for the first time was aware that Dolores knelt in the dirt opposite to her striving to lift the body upon which Don Juan had been lying.

The strength of Dolores was unequal to the task; so Mother Jenks, hardened, courageous, calm as her sainted 'Enery at his inglorious finish, rose and stepped around to her side to help her. She could see this other was a white man, too; coolly she stooped and wiped his gory face with the hem of her apron. And then she recognized him!

"Lift him up! Give him to me!" Dolores sobbed. "Oh, Caliph, my poor dear, big-hearted blundering boy!"

She got her arm under his head; Mother Jenks aided her; and the limp body was lifted to a sitting position; then Dolores knelt on one knee, supporting him with the other, and drew his head over on her shoulder; with her white cheek cuddled against his, she spoke into his deaf ears the little, tender, foolish words that mothers have for their children, that

women have for the stricken men of their love. She pleaded with him to open his eyes, to speak to her and tell her he still lived; so close was his face to hers that she saw an old but very faint white scar running diagonally across his left eyebrow—and kissed it.

Presently strong arms took him from her; clinging to somebody—she knew not whom—she followed, moaning broken-heartedly, while eight men, forming a rude litter with four rifles passed under his body, bore Webster to the shade of a tufted palm inside the palace gate.

As they laid Webster down for a moment there Dolores saw a tall, youthful man, of handsome features and noble bearing, approach and look at him. In his eyes there were tears; a sob escaped him as with a little impulsive, affectionate movement he patted John Stuart Webster's cheek.

"My friend!" the fainting Dolores heard him murmur. "My great-hearted, whimsical, lovable John Webster. You made it possible for me to meet you here to-night—and this is the meeting!"

CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN

WHILE Ricardo watched beside the unconscious Webster one of his aides galloped up the street, to return presently with a detachment with stretchers, into which Webster and Don Juan Cafetéro were laid and carried up the palace driveway into the huge golden reception-hall where only the night before Sarros had greeted the belles and beaux of his capital. In the meantime Mother Jenks had succeeded in restoring Dolores to consciousness; supported by the indomitable old woman the girl slowly followed the grim procession until, at the door of the reception-room, they found their further progress barred by a sentry.

"The red-haired man is dead," he informed them in response to their eager queries. "If you want his body," he continued, hazarding a guess as to their mission, "I guess you can have it. There he is." And the sentry pointed to the stretcher which had been set down along the wall of the reception-hall.

"'Ow about the other?" Mother Jenks demanded. Don Juan Cafetéro had, unfortunately, been so much of a nuisance to her in life that she was not minded to be troubled greatly over him in death, although the Spartanlike manner of his exit had thrilled the British bulldog blood in her.

"The big fellow isn't quite dead yet, but I'm afraid he's a goner. The surgeons have him in this room now. Friend of yours, Miss?" he inquired in tones freighted with neighbourly sympathy.

Dolores nodded.

"Sorry I can't let you in, Miss," he continued, "but the General ordered me to keep everybody out until the doctors have finished looking him over. If I was you, I'd wait in that room across the hall; then you can get the first news when the doctors come out."

Mother Jenks accepted his advice and steered her charge into the room indicated. And as they waited, Ricardo Ruey stood anxiously beside the table on which John Stuart Webster's big, limp body reposed, while Doctor Pacheco, assisted by a Sobrantean confrère, went deftly over him with surgical scissors and cut the blood-soaked clothing from his body.

"He breathes very gently," the rebel leader said, presently. "Is there any hope?"

The little doctor shrugged. "I fear not. That bayonet-thrust in the left side missed his heart but not his lung."

"But apparently he hasn't bled much from that wound."

"The hemorrhage is probably internal. Even if that congestion of blood in the lungs does not prove fatal very shortly, he cannot, in his weakened state, survive the traumatic fever from all these wounds. It is bound—hello, how our poor friend still lives with the bayonet broken off in his body—for here is steel—hah! Not a bayonet, but a pistol."

He unbuttoned the wounded man's coat and found a strap running diagonally up across his breast and over the right shoulder, connecting with a holster under the left arm. The doctor unbuckled this strap and removed the holster, which contained Webster's spare gun; Ricardo, glancing disinterestedly at the sheathed weapon, noted a small, new, triangular hole in the leather holster. He picked it up, withdrew the pistol, and found a deep scratch, recently made, along the blued steel close to the vulcanite butt.

When Ricardo glanced at Pacheco after his scrutiny of the pistol and holster, the doctor's dark eyes were regarding him mirthfully.

"I have been unnecessarily alarmed, my general," said Pacheco. "Our dear friend has been most fortunate in his choice of wounds——"

"He's a lucky Yankee; that's what he is, my dear Pacheco. A lucky Yankee!" Ricardo leaned over and examined the bayonet-wound in Webster's left side. "He took the point of the steel on this pistol he happened to be wearing under his left arm," he went on to explain. "That turned the bayonet and it slid along his ribs, making a superficial flesh-wound."

Pacheco nodded. "And this bullet merely burned the top of his right shoulder, while another passed through his biceps without touching the bone. His most severe wound is this jab in the hip."

They stripped every stitch of clothing from Webster and went over him carefully. At the back of his

head they found a little clotted blood from a small split in the scalp; also they found a lump of generous proportions. Pacheco laughed briefly but contentedly.

"Then he is not even seriously injured?" Ricardo interrupted that laugh.

"I would die of fright if I had to fight this fine fellow a month from to-day," the little doctor chirped. "Look at that chest, *mi general*—and that flat abdomen. The man is in superb physical condition; it is the bump on the head that renders him unconscious—not loss of blood."

As if to confirm this expert testimony Webster at that moment breathed long and deeply, screwed up his face and shook his head very slightly. Thereafter for several minutes he gave no further evidence of an active interest in life—seeing which Pacheco decided to take prompt advantage of his unconsciousness and probe the wounds in his arm and shoulder for the fragments of clothing which the bullets must have carried into them. After ten minutes of probing Pacheco announced that he was through and ready to bandage; whereupon John Stuart Webster said faintly but very distinctly, in English:

"I'm awfully glad you are, Doc'. It hurt like hell! Did you manage to get a bite on that fishing-trip?"

"Jack Webster, you scoundrel!" Ricardo yelled joyously, and he shook the patient with entire disregard of the latter's wounds. "Oh, man, I'm glad you're not dead."

"Your sentiments appeal to me strongly, my friend. I'm—too—tired to look—at you. Who the devil—are you?"

"I'm Ricardo."

Fell a silence, while Webster prepared for another speech. "Where am I?"

"In the palace."

"Hum-m! Then it was a famous victory."

"One strong, decisive blow did the trick, old chap. We won pulled-up, and that forty-thousand-dollar bet of yours is safe. I'll cash the ticket for you to-morrow morning."

"Damn the forty thousand. Where's my Croppy Boy?"

"Your what?"

"My wild Irish blackthorn, Don Juan Cafetéro."

"I hope, old man, he has ere now that which all brave Irishmen and true deserve—a harp with a crown. In life the Irish have the harp without the crown, you know."

"How did he die?" Webster whispered.

"He died hard, with the holes in front—and he died for you."

Two big tears trickled slowly through Webster's closed lids and rolled across his pale cheek. "Poor, lost, lonesome, misunderstood wreck," he murmured presently, "he was an extremist in all things. He used to sing those wonderfully poetic ballads of his people—I remember one that began: 'Green were the fields where my forefathers dwelt.' I think his heart was in Kerry—so we'll send him there. He's

my dead, Ricardo; care for his body, because I'm—going to plant Don Juan with the—shamrocks. They didn't understand him here. He was an exile—so I'm going to send him—home."

"He shall have a military funeral," Rocardo promised.

"From the cathedral," Webster added. "And take a picture of it for his people. He told me about them. I want them to think he amounted to something, after all. And when you get this two-by-four republic of yours going again, Rick, you might have your congress award Don Juan a thousand dollars *oro* for capturing Sarros. Then we can send the money to his old folks."

"But he didn't capture Sarros," Ricardo protested. "The man escaped when the Guards cut their way through."

"He didn't. That was a ruse while he beat it out the gate where you found me. I saw Don Juan knock him cold with the (butt) of his rifle after I'd brought down his horse." barrel, it says on p. 330

"Do you think he's there yet?"

"He may be—provided all this didn't happen the day before yesterday. If I wanted him, I'd go down and look for him, Rick."

"I'll go right away, Jack."

"One minute, then. Send a man around to that little back street where they have the wounded—it's a couple of blocks away from here—to tell Mother Jenks and the young lady with her I'll not be back."

"They're both outside now. They must have gone

looking for you, because they found you and Don Juan first and then told me about it."

"Who told you?"

"Mother Jenks."

"Oh! Well, run along and get your man."

Ricardo departed on the run, taking the sentry at the door with him and in his haste giving no thought to Mother Jenks and her companion waiting for the doctor's verdict. In the palace grounds he gathered two more men and bade them follow him; leading by twenty yards, he emerged at the gate and paused to look around him.

Some hundred feet down the street from the palace gate Sarros's bay charger lay dead. When Webster's bullet brought the poor beast down, his rider had fallen clear of him, only to fall a victim to the ferocity of Don Juan Cafetéro. Later, as Sarros lay stunned and bleeding beside his mount, the stricken animal in its death-struggle had half risen, only to fall again, this time on the extended left leg of his late master; consequently when Sarros recovered consciousness following the thoughtful attentions of his assailant, it was to discover himself a hopeless prisoner. The heavy carcass of his horse pinned his foot and part of his leg to the ground, rendering him as helpless and desperate as a trapped animal. For several minutes now he had been striving frantically to release himself; with his sound right leg pressed against the animal's backbone he tried to gain sufficient purchase to withdraw his left leg from the carcass.

As Ricardo caught sight of Sarros he instinctively

realized that this was his mortal enemy; motioning his men to stand back, he approached the struggling man on tiptoe and thoughtfully possessed himself of the dictator's pistol, which lay in back of him but not out of reach. Just as he did so, Sarros, apparently convinced of the futility of his efforts to free himself, surrendered to fate and commenced rather pitifully to weep with rage and despair.

Ricardo watched him for a few seconds, for there was just sufficient of the blood of his Castilian ancestors still in his veins to render this sorry spectacle rather an enjoyable one to him. Besides, he was 50 per cent. Iberian, a race which can hate quite as thoroughly as it can love, and for a time Ricardo even nourished the thought of still further indulging his thirst for revenge by pretending to aid Sarros in his escape! Presently, however, he put the ungenerous thought from him; seizing the dead horse by the tail, he dragged the carcass off his enemy's leg, and while Sarros sat up, tailor-fashion, and commenced to tub the circulation back into the bruised member, Ricardo seated himself on the rump of the dead horse and appraised his prisoner critically.

Sarros glanced up, remembered his manners and very heartily and gracefully thanked his deliverer.

"It is not a matter for which thanks are due me, Sarros," Ricardo replied coldly. "I am Ricardo Luiz Ruey, and I have come back to Sobrante to pay my father's debt to you. You will remember having forced the obligation upon me in the cemetery some fifteen years ago."

For perhaps ten horrified seconds Sarros stared at Ricardo; then the dark blood in him came to his defense; his tense pose relaxed; the fright and despair left his swarthy countenance as if erased with a moist sponge, leaving him as calmly stoical and indifferent as a cigarstore Indian. He fumbled in his coat pocket for a gold cigarette case, selected a cigarette, lighted it and blew smoke at Ricardo. The jig was up; he knew it; and with admirable nonchalance he declined to lower his presidential dignity by discussing or considering it. He realized it would delight his captor to know he dreaded to face the issue, and it was not a Sarros practice to give aid and comfort to the enemy

"Spunky devil!" Ricardo reflected, forced to admiration despite himself. Aloud he said: "You know the code of our people, Sarros. An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth."

Sarros bowed. "I am at your service," he replied carelessly.

"Then at daylight to-morrow morning I shall make settlement." Ricardo beckoned his men to approach. "Take this man and confine him under a double guard in the arsenal," he ordered. "Present my compliments to the officer in charge there and tell him it is my wish that a priest be provided for the prisoner to-night, and that to-morrow morning, at six o'clock, a detail of six men and a sergeant escort this man to the cemetery in the rear of the Catedral de la Cruz. I will meet the detail there and take command of it."

Two of Ricardo's imported fighting men stepped to the prisoner's side, seized him, one by each arm, and lifted him to his feet; supported between them, he limped away to his doom, while his youthful conqueror remained seated on the dead horse, his gaze bent upon the ground, his mind dwelling, not upon his triumph over Sarros but upon the prodigious proportions of the task before him: the rehabilitation of a nation. After a while he rose and strolled over toward the gate, where he paused to note the grim evidences of the final stand of Webster and Don Juan Cafetéro before passing through the portal.

Ricardo had now, for the first time, an opportunity to look around him; so he halted to realize his homecoming, to thrill with this, the first real view of the home of his boyhood. The spacious lawn surrounding the palace had been plowed and scarred with bursting shrapnel from the field guns captured in the arsenal, although the building itself had been little damaged, not having sustained a direct hit because of Ricardo's stringent orders not to use artillery on the palace unless absolutely necessary to smoke Sarros out. Scattered over the grounds Ricardo counted some twenty-odd Government soldiers, all wearing that pathetically flat, crumpled appearance which seems inseparable from the bodies of men killed in action. The first shrapnel had probably commenced to drop in the grounds just as a portion of the palace garrison had been marching out to join the troops fighting at the cantonment barracks. Evidently the men had scattered like quail, only to be killed as they ran.

From this grim scene Ricardo raised his eyes to the palace, the castellated towers of which, looming through the tufted palms, were reflecting the setting sun. Over the balustrade of one of the upper balconies the limp body of a Sarros sharpshooter, picked off from the street, drooped grotesquely, his arms hanging downward as if in ironical welcome to the son of Ruey the Beloved. The sight induced in Ricardo a sense of profound sadness; his Irish imagination awoke; to him that mute figure seemed to call upon him for pity, for kindness, for forbearance, for understanding and sympathy. Those outflung arms of the martyred peon symbolized to Ricardo Ruey the spirit of liberty, shackled and helpless, calling upon him for deliverance; they brought to his alert mind a clearer realization of the duty that was his than he had ever had before. He had a great task to perform, a task inaugurated by his father, and which Ricardo could not hope to finish in his lifetime. He must solve the agrarian problem; he must develop the rich natural resources of his country; he must provide free, compulsory education and evolve from the ignorance of the peon an intelligence that would built up that which Sobrante, in common with her sister republics, so woefully lacked—the great middle class that stands always as a buffer between the aggression and selfishness of the upper class and the helplessness and childishness of the lower.

Ricardo bowed his head. "Help me, O Lord," he prayed. "Thou hast given me in Thy wisdom a man's task. Help me that I may not prove unworthy."

CHAPTER TWENTY-EIGHT

MOTHER JENKS, grown impatient at the lack of news concerning Webster, left Dolores to her grief in the room across the hall and sought the open air, for of late she had been experiencing with recurring frequency a slight feeling of suffocation. She sat down on the broad granite steps, helped herself to a much-needed "bracer" from her brandy flask and was gazing pensively at the scene around her when Ricardo came up the stairs.

"'Ello!" Mother Jenks saluted him. "W'ere 'ave you been, Mr. Bowers?"

"I have just returned from capturing Sarros, Mrs. Jenks. He is on his way to the arsenal under guard."

"Gor' strike me pink!" the old lady cried. "'Ave I lived to see this day!" Her face was wreathed in a happy smile. "I wonder 'ow the beggar feels to 'ave the shoe on the other foot, eh—the 'eartless 'ound! I'm 'opin' this General Ruey will 'ave the blighter shot."

"You need have no worry on that score, Mrs. Jenks. I'm General Ruey. Andrew Bowers was just my summer name, as it were."

"Angels guard me! Wot the bloomin' 'ell surprise won't we 'ave next. Wot branch o' the Ruey tribe do you belong to? Are you a nephew o' him that

was president before Sarros shot 'im? Antonio Ruey, who was 'arf brother to the president, 'ad a son 'e called Ricardo. Are you 'im, might I arsk?"

"I am the son of Ricardo the Beloved," he answered proudly.

"Not the lad as was away at school when 'is father was hexecuted?"

"I am that same lad, Mrs. Jenks. And who are you? You seem to know a deal of my family history."

"I," the old publican replied with equal pride, "am Mrs. Colonel 'Enery Jenks, who was your father's chief of hartillery an' 'ad the hextreme honour o' dyin' in front o' the same wall with 'im. By the w'y, 'ow's Mr. Webster?" she added, suddenly remembering the subject closest to her heart just then.

"His wounds are trifling. He'll live, Mrs. Jenks."

"Well, that's better than gettin' poked in the eye with a sharp stick," the old dame decided philosophically.

"Do you remember my little sister, Mrs. Jenks?" Ricardo continued. "She was in the palace when Sarros attacked it; she perished there."

"I believe I 'ave got a slight recollection o' the nipper, sir," Mother Jenks answered cautiously. To herself she said: "I s'y, 'Enrietta, 'ere's a pretty go. 'E don't know the lamb is livin' an' in the next room! My word, wot a riot w'en 'e meets 'er!"

"I will see you again, Mrs. Jenks. I must have a long talk with you," Ricardo told her, and passed on into the palace; whereupon Mother Jenks once

more fervently implored the Almighty to strike her pink, and the iron restraint of a long, hard, exciting day being relaxed at last, the good soul bowed her gray head in her arms and wept, moving her body from side to side the while and demanding, of no one in particular, a single legitimate reason why she, a blooming old baggage and not fit to live, should be the recipient of such manifold blessings as this day had brought forth.

In the meantime Ricardo, with his hand on the knob of the door leading to the room where Webster was having his wounds dressed, paused suddenly, his attention caught by the sound of a sob, long-drawn and inexpressibly pathetic. He listened and made up his mind that a woman in the room across the entrance-hall was bewailing the death of a loved one who answered to the name of Caliph and John darling. Further eavesdropping convinced him that Caliph, John darling, and Mr. John Stuart Webster were one and the same person, and so he tilted his head on one side like a cock-robin and considered.

"By jingo, that's most interesting," he decided. "The wounded hero has a sweetheart or a wife—and an American, too. She must be a recent acquisition, because all the time we were together on the steamer coming down here he never spoke of either, despite the fact that we got friendly enough for such confidences. Something funny about this. I'd better sound the old boy before I start passing out words of comfort to that unhappy female."

He passed on into the room. John Stuart Web-

ster had, by this time, been washed and bandaged, and one of the Sarros servants (for the ex-dictator's retinue still occupied the palace) had, at Doctor Pacheco's command, prepared a guest-chamber upstairs and furnished a nightgown of ample proportions to cover Mr. Webster's bebandaged but otherwise naked person. A stretcher had just arrived, and the wounded man was about to be carried upstairs. The late financial backer of the revolution was looking very pale and dispirited; for once in his life his whimsical, bantering nature was subdued. His eyes were closed, and he did not open them when Ricardo entered.

"Well, I have Sarros," the latter declared.

Webster paid not the slightest attention to this announcement. Ricardo bent over him. "Jack, old boy," he queried, "do you know a person of feminine persuasion who calls you Caliph?"

John Stuart Webster's eyes and mouth flew wide open. "What the devil!" he tried to roar. "You haven't been speaking to her, have you? If you have, I'll never forgive you, because you've spoiled my little surprise party."

"No, I haven't been speaking to her, but she's in the next room crying fit to break her heart because she thinks you've been killed."

"You scoundrel! Aren't you human? Go tell her it's only a couple of punctures, not a blowout." He sighed. "Isn't it sweet of her to weep over an old hunks like me!" he added softly. "Bless her tender heart!"

"Who is she?" Ricardo was very curious.

"That's none of your business. You wait and I'll tell you. She's the guest I told you I was going to bring to dinner, and that's enough for you to know for the present. *Vaya*, you idiot, and bring her in here, so I can assure her my head is bloody but unbowed. Doctor, throw that rug over my shanks and make me look pretty. I'm going to receive company."

His glance, bent steadily on the door, had in it some of the alert, bright wistfulness frequently to be observed in the eyes of a terrier standing expectantly before a rat-hole. The instant the door opened and Dolores's tear-stained face appeared, he called to her with the old-time camaraderie, for he had erased from his mind, for the nonce, the memory of the tragedy of poor Don Juan Cafetéro and was concerned solely with the task of banishing the tears from those brown eyes and bringing the joy of life back to that sweet face.

"Hello, Seeress," he called weakly. "Little Johnny's been fighting again, and the bad boys gave him an all-fired walloping."

There was a swift rustle of skirts, and she was bending over him, her hot little palms clasping eagerly his pale, rough cheeks. "Oh, my dear, my dear!" she whispered, and then her voice choked with the happy tears and she was sobbing on his wounded shoulder. Ricardo stooped to draw her away, but John Stuart bent upon him a look of such frightfulness that he drew back abashed. After all, the

past twenty-four hours had been quite exciting, and Ricardo reflected that John's inamorata was tired and frightened and probably hadn't eaten anything all day long, so there was ample excuse for her hysteria.

"Come, come, buck up," Webster soothed her, and helped himself to a long whiff of her fragrant hair. "Old man Webster had one leg in the grave, but they've pulled it out again."

Still she sobbed.

"Now, listen to me, lady," he commanded with mock severity. "You just stop that. You're wasting your sympathy; and while, of course, I enjoy your sympathy a heap, just pause to reflect on the result if those salt tears should happen to drop into one of my numerous wounds."

"I'm so sorry for you, Caliph," she murmured brokenly. "You poor, harmless boy! I don't see how any one could be so fiendish as to hurt you when you were so distinctly a non-combatant."

"Thank you. Let us forget the Hague Conference for the present, however. Have you met your brother?" he whispered.

"No, Caliph."

"Ricardo."

"Yes, Jack."

"Come here. Rick, you scheming, unscrupulous, bloodthirsty adventurer, I have a tremendous surprise in store for you. The sweetest girl in the world —and she's right here——"

Ricardo laughingly held up his hand. "Jack, my friend," he interrupted, "you're too weak to make a

speech. Don't do it. Besides, you do not have to." He turned and bowed gracefully to Dolores. "I can see for myself she's the sweetest girl in the world, and that she's right here." He held out his hand to her. "Jack thinks he's going to spring a surprise," he continued maliciously, "quite forgetting that a good soldier never permits himself to be taken by surprise. I know all about his little secret, because I heard you mourning for him when you thought he was dead." Ricardo favoured her with a knowing wink. "I am delighted to meet the future Mrs. Webster. I quite understand why you fell in love with him, because, you see, I love him myself and do does everybody else."

With typical Castilian courtliness he took her hand, bowed low over it, and kissed it. "I am Ricardo Luiz Ruey," he said, anxious to spare his friend the task of further exhausting conversation. "And you are——"

"You're a consummate jackass!" groaned Webster. "I'm only a dear old family friend, and Dolores is going to marry Billy Geary. You impetuous idiot! She's your own sister Dolores Ruey. She, Mark Twain, and I have ample cause for common complaint against the world because the reports of our death have been grossly exaggerated. She didn't perish when your father's administration crumbled. Miss Ruey, this is your brother Ricardo. Kiss her you damn' fool—forgive me, Miss Ruey—oh, Lord, nothing matters any more. He's gummed everything up and ruined my party. I wish I were dead."

Ricardo stared from the outraged Webster to his sister and back again.

"Jack Webster," he declared, "you aren't crazy, are you?"

"Of course he is—the old dear," Dolores cried happily, "but I'm not." She stepped up to her brother, and her arms went around his neck. "Oh, Rick," she cried, "I'm your sister. Truly, I am."

"Dolores. My little lost sister Dolores? Why, I can't believe it!"

"Well, you'd better believe it," John Stuart Webster growled feebly. "Of course, you can doubt my word and get away with it, now that I'm flat on my back, but if you dare cast aspersions on that girl's veracity, I'll murder you a month from now."

He closed his eyes, feeling instinctively that he ought not spy on such a sacred family scene. When, however, the affecting meeting was over and Dolores was ruffling the Websterian foretop while her brother pressed the Websterian hand and tried to say all the things he felt but couldn't express, John Stuart Webster brought them both back to a realization of present conditions.

"Don't thank me, sir," he piped in pathetic imitation of the small boy of melodrama. "I have only done me duty, and for that I cannot accept this purse of gold, even though my father and mother are starving."

"Oh, Caliph, do be serious," Dolores pleaded.

He looked up at her fondly. "Take your brother out to Mother Jenks and prove your case, Miss

Ruey," he advised her. "And while you're at it, I certainly hope somebody will remember I'm not accustomed to reposing on a centre table. Rick, if you can persuade some citizen of this conquered commonwealth to put me to bed, I'd be obliged. I'm dead tired, old horse. I'm—ah—sleepy——"

His head rolled weakly to one side, for he had been playing a part and had nerved himself to finish it gracefully, even in his weakened condition. He sighed, moaned slightly, and slipped into unconsciousness.

CHAPTER TWENTY-NINE

THROUGHOUT the night there was sporadic firing here and there in the city, as the Ruey followers relentlessly hunted down the isolated detachment of Government troops which had escaped annihilation and capture in the final rout and fallen back on the city, where, concealing themselves according to their nature and inclination, they indulged in more or less sniping from windows and the roofs of buildings. The practice of taking no prisoners was an old one in Sobrante, and few presidents had done more than Sarros to keep that custom alive; ergo, firm in the conviction that to surrender was tantamount to facing a firing squad at daylight, the majority of these stragglers, with consummate courage, fought to the death.

The capture of Buenaventura was alone sufficient to insure a brief revolution, but the capture of Sarros was ample guarantee that the resistance to the new order of things was already at an end. However, Ricardo Ruey felt that the prompt execution of Sarros would be an added guarantee of peace by effectually discouraging any opposition to the rebel cause in the outlying districts, where a few isolated garrisons still remained in ignorance of the momentous events being enacted in the capital. For the time being, Ricardo

was master of life and death in Sobrante, and all of his advisers and supporters agreed with him that a so-called trial of the ex-dictator would be a rather useless affair. His life was forfeit a hundred times for murder and treason, and to be ponderous over his elimination would savour of mockery. Accordingly, at midnight, a priest entered the room in the arsenal where Sarros was confined, and shrived him. Throughout the night the priest remained with him, and when that early morning march to the cemetery commenced, he walked beside Sarros, repeating the prayers for the dying.

Upon reaching the cemetery there was a slight wait until a carriage drove up and discharged Ricardo Ruey and Mother Jenks. The sergeant in command of the squad saluted and was briefly ordered to proceed with the matter in hand; whereupon he turned to Sarros, who with the customary *sang froid* of his kind upon such occasions was calmly smoking, and bowed deprecatingly. Sarros actually smiled upon him. "*Adios, amigos,*" he murmured. Then, as an afterthought and probably because he was sufficient of an egoist to desire to appear a martyr, he added heroically: "I die for my country. May God have mercy on my enemies."

"If you'd cared to play a gentleman's game, you blighter, you might 'ave lived for your bally country," Mother Jenks reminded him in English. "Wonder if the beggar'll wilt or will 'e go through smilin' like my sainted 'Enery on the syme spot."

She need not have worried. It requires a strong

man to be dictator of a Roman-candle republic for fifteen years, and whatever his sins of omission or commission, Sarros did not lack animal courage. Alone and unattended he limped away among the graves to the wall on the other side of the cemetery and placed his back against it, negligently in the attitude of a devil-may-care fellow without a worry in life. The sergeant waited respectfully until Sarros had finished his cigarette; when he tossed it away and straightened to attention, the sergeant knew he was ready to die. At his command there was a sudden rattle of bolts as the cartridges slid from the magazines into the breeches; there followed a momentary halt, another command; the squad was aiming when Ricardo Ruey called sharply:

"Sergeant, do not give the order to fire."

The rifles were lowered and the men gazed wonderingly at Ricardo. "He's too brave," Ricardo complained. "Damn him, I can't kill him as I would a mad-dog. I've got to give him a chance."

The sergeant raised his brows expressively. Ah, the *ley fuga*, that popular form of execution where the prisoner is given a running chance, and the firing-squad practises wing shooting If the prisoner manages, miraculously, to escape, he is not pursued!

A doubt, however, crossed the sergeant's mind. "But, my general," he expostulated, "Señor Sarros cannot accept the *ley fuga*. He is very lame. That is not giving him the chance your Excellency desires he should have."

"I wasn't thinking of that," Ricardo replied. "I

was thinking I'm killing him without a fair trial for the reason that he's so infernally ripe for the gallows that a trial would have been a joke. Nevertheless, I am really killing him because he killed my father—and that is scarcely fair. My father was a gentleman. Sergeant, is your pistol loaded?"

"Yes, General."

"Give it to Señor Sarros."

As the sergeant started forward to comply Ricardo drew his own service revolver and then motioned Mother Jenks and the firing-squad to stand aside while he crossed to the centre of the cemetery. "Sarros," he called, "I am going to let God decide which one of us shall live. When the sergeant gives the command to fire, I shall open fire on you, and you are free to do the same to me. Sergeant, if he kills me and escapes unhurt, my orders are to escort him to the bay in my carriage and put him safely aboard the steamer."

Mother Jenks sat down on a tombstone. "Gord's truth!" she gasped, "but there's a rare plucked 'un." Aloud she croaked: "Don't be a bally ass, sir."

"Silence!" he commanded.

The sergeant handed Sarros the revolver. "You heard what I said?" Ricardo called.

Sarros bowed gravely.

"You understand your orders, Sergeant?"

"Yes, General."

"Very well. Proceed. If this prisoner fires before you give the word, have your squad riddle him."

The sergeant backed away and gazed owlishly from

the prisoner to his captor. "Ready!" he called. Both revolvers came up. "Fire!" he shouted, and the two shots were discharged simultaneously. Ricardo's cap flew off his head, but he remained standing, while Sarros staggered back against the wall and there recovering himself gamely, fired again. He scored a clean miss, and Ricardo's gun barked three times; Sarros sprawled on his face, rose to his knees, raised his pistol halfway, fired into the sky and slid forward on his face. Ricardo stood beside the body until the sergeant approached and stood to attention, his attitude saying:

"It is over. What next, General?"

"Take the squad back to the arsenal, Sergeant," Ricardo ordered him coolly, and walked back to recover his uniform cap. He was smiling as he ran his finger through a gaping hole in the upper half of the crown.

"Well, Mrs. Jenks," he announced when he rejoined the old lady, "that was better than executing him with a firing-squad. I gave him a square deal. Now his friends can never say that I murdered him."

He extended his hand to help Mother Jenks to her feet. She stood erect and felt again that queer swelling of the heart, the old feeling of suffocation.

"Steady, lass!" she mumbled. "'Old on to me, sir. It's my bally haneurism. Gor'—I'm—chokin'——"

He caught her in his arms as she lurched toward him. Her face was purple, and in her eyes there was a queer fierce light that went out suddenly, leaving

them dull and glazed. When she commenced to sag in his arms, he eased her gently to the ground and laid her on her back in the grass.

"The nipper's safe, 'Enery," he heard her murmur. "I've raised 'er a lydy, s'elp me—she's back where—you found 'er—'Enery——"

She quivered, and the light came creeping back into her eyes before it faded forever. "Comin', 'Enery—darlin'," she whispered; and then the soul of Mother Jenks, who had a code and lived up to it (which is more than the majority of us do), had departed upon the ultimate journey. Ricardo gazed down on the hard old mouth, softened now by a little half-smile of mingled yearning and gladness: "What a wonderful soul you had," he murmured, and kissed her.

In the end she slept in the niche in the wall of the Catedral de la Vera Cruz, beside her sainted 'Enery.

CHAPTER THIRTY

THREE days passed. Don Juan Cafetéro had been buried with all the pomp and circumstance of a national hero; Mother Jenks, too, had gone to her appointed resting-place, and El Buen Amigo had been closed forever. Ricardo had issued a proclamation announcing himself provisional president of Sobrante; a convention of revolutionary leaders had been held, and a provisional cabinet selected. A day for the national elections had been named; the wreckage of the brief revolution had been cleared away, and the wheels of government were once more revolving freely and noiselessly. And while all of this had been going on, John Stuart Webster had lain on his back, staring at the palace ceiling and absolutely forbidden to receive visitors. He was still engaged in this mild form of gymnastics on the third day when the door of his room opened and Dolores looked in on him.

"Good evening, Caliph," she called. "Aren't you dead yet?"

It was exactly the tone she should have adopted to get the best results, for Webster had been mentally and physically ill since she had seen him last, and needed some such pleasantry as this to lift him out of his gloomy mood. He grinned at her boyishly.

"No, I'm not dead. On the contrary, I'm feeling real chirpy. Won't you come in and visit for a while, Miss Ruey?"

"Well, since you've invited me, I shall accept." Entering, she stood beside his bed and took the hand he extended toward her. "This is the first opportunity I've had, Miss Ruey," he began, "to apologize for the shock I gave you the other day. I should have come back to you as I promised, instead of getting into a fight and scaring you half to death. I hope you'll forgive me, because I'm paying for my fun now—with interest."

"Very well, Caliph. I'll forgive you—on one condition."

"Who am I to resist having a condition imposed upon me? Name your terms. I shall obey."

"I'm weary of being called Miss Ruey. I want to be Dolores—to you."

"By the toenails of Moses," he reflected, "there is no escape. She's determined to rock the boat." Aloud he said: "All right, Dolores. I suppose I may as well take the license of the old family friend. I guess Bill won't mind."

"Billy hasn't a word to say about it," she retorted, regarding him with that calm, impersonal, yet vitally interested look that always drove him frantic with the desire for her.

"Well, of course, I understand that," he countered. "Naturally, since Bill is only a man, you'll have to manage him and he'll have to take orders."

"Caliph, you're a singularly persistent man, once

you get an idea into your head. Please understand me, once for all: Billy Geary is a dear, and it's a mystery to me why every girl in the world isn't perfectly crazy about him, but every rule has its exceptions—and Billy and I are just good friends. I'd like to know where you got the idea we're engaged to be married."

"Why—why—well, aren't you?"

"Certainly not."

"Well, you—er—you ought to be. I expected—that is, I planned—I mean Bill told me and—and—and—er—it never occurred to me you could possibly have the—er—crust—to refuse him. Of course you're going to marry him when he asks you?"

"Of course I am not."

"Ah-h-h-h!" John Stuart Webster gazed at her in frank amazement. "Not going to marry Bill Geary!" he cried, highly scandalized.

"I know you think I ought to, and I suppose it will appear quite incomprehensible to you when I do not——"

"Why, Dolores, my dear girl! This is most amazing. Didn't Bill ask you to marry him before he left?"

"Yes, he did me that honour, and I declined him."

"You *what!*"

She smiled at him so maternally that his hand itched to drag her down to him and kiss her curving lips.

"Do you mind telling me just why you took this extraordinary attitude?"

"You have no right to ask, but I'll tell you. I refused Billy because I didn't love him enough—that way. What's more, I never could."

He rolled his head to one side and softly, very softly, whistled two bars of "The Spanish Cavalier" through his teeth He was properly thunder-struck —so much so, in fact, that for a moment he actually forgot her presence the while he pondered this most incredible state of affairs.

"I see it all now. It's as clear as mud," he announced finally. "You refused poor old Bill and broke his heart, and so he went away and hasn't had the courage to write me since. I'm afraid Bill and I both regarded this fight as practically won—all over but the wedding-march, as one might put it. I might as well confess I hustled the boy down from the mine just so you two could get married and light out on your honeymoon I figured Bill could kill two birds with one stone—have his honeymoon and get rid of his malaria, and return here in three or four months to relieve me, after I had the mine in operation. Poor boy. That was a frightful song-and-dance you gave him."

"I suspected you were the matchmaker in this case. I must say I think you're old enough to know better, Caliph John."

"You did, eh? Well, what made you think so?"

She chuckled. "Oh, you're very obvious—to a woman."

"I forgot that you reveal the past and foretell the future."

"You are really very clumsy, Caliph. You should never try to direct the destiny of any woman."

"I'm on the sick list," he pleaded, "and it isn't sporting of you to discuss me. You're healthy—so let us discuss you. Dolores, do you figure Bill's case to be absolutely hopeless?"

"Absolutely, Caliph."

"Hum-m-m!"

Again Webster had recourse to meditation, seeing which, Dolores walked to the pier-glass in the corner, satisfied herself that her coiffure was just so and returned to his side, singing softly a little song that had floated out over the transom of Webster's room door into the hall one night:

> A Spanish cavalier,
> Went out to rope a steer,
> Along with his paper *cigar-r-ro!*
> "*Caramba!*" said he.
> "*Mañana* you will be
> *Mucho bueno carne por mio.*"

He turned his head and looked up at her suddenly, searchingly. "Is there anybody else in Bill's way?" he demanded. "I admit it's none of my business, but——"

"Yes, Caliph, there is some one else."

"I thought so." This rather viciously. "I'm willing to gamble a hundred to one, sight unseen, that whoever he is, he isn't half the man Bill is."

"That," she replied coldly, "is a matter of personal opinion."

"And Bill's clock is fixed for keeps?"

"Yes, Caliph. And he never had a chance from the start."

"Why not?"

"Well, I met the other man first, Caliph."

"Oh! Do you mind telling me what this other man does for a living?"

"He's a mining man, like Billy."

"All right! Has the son of a horsethief got a mine like Bill's? That's something to consider, Dolores."

"He has a mine fully as good as Billy's. Like Billy, he owns a half interest in it, too."

"Hum-m-m! How long have you known him?"

"Not very long."

"Be sure you're right—then go ahead," John Stuart Webster warned her. "Don't marry in haste and repent at leisure, Dolores. Know your man before you let him buy the wedding ring. There's a heap of difference, my dear, between sentiment and sentimentality."

"I'm sure of my man, Caliph."

He was silent again, thinking rapidly. "Well, of course," he began again presently, "while there was the slightest possibility of Bill winning you, I would have died before saying that which I am about to say to you now, Dolores, because Bill is my friend, and I'd never double-cross him. With reference to this other man, however, I have no such code to consider. I'm pretty well convinced I'm out of the running, but I'll give that lad a race if it's the last act of my life. He's a stranger to me, and he isn't

on the job to protect his claim, so why shouldn't I stake it if I can? But are you quite certain you aren't making a grave mistake in refusing Billy? He's quite a boy, my dear. I know him from soul to suspenders, and he'd be awfully good to you. He's kind and gentle and considerate, and he's not a molly-coddle, either."

"I can't help it, Caliph. Please don't talk about him any more. I know somebody who is kinder and nobler and gentler." She ceased abruptly, fearful of breaking down her reserve and saying too much.

"Well, if Bill's case is hopeless"—his hand came groping for hers, while he held her with his searching, wistful glance—"I wonder what mine looks like. That is, Dolores, I—I——'

"Yes, John?"

"I've played fair with my friend," he whispered eagerly. "I'm not going to ask you to marry me, but I want to tell you that to me you're such a very wonderful woman I can't help loving you with my whole heart and soul.'

"I have suspected this, John," she replied gravely.

"I suppose so. I'm such an obvious old fool. I've had my dream, and I've put it behind me, but I —I just want you to know I love you; so long as I live, I shall want to serve you When you're married to this other man, and things do not break just right for you both—if I have something he wants, in order to make you happy, I want you to know it's yours to give to him. I—I—I guess that's all, Dolores."

"Thank you, John. Would you like to know this man I'm going to marry?"

"Yes, I think I'd like to congratulate the scoundrel."

"Then I'll introduce you to him, John. I first met him on a train in Death Valley, California. He was a shaggy old dear, all whiskers and rags, but his whiskers couldn't hide his smile, and his rags couldn't hide his manhood, and when he thrashed a drummer because the man annoyed me, I just couldn't help falling in love with him. Even when he fibbed to me and disputed my assertion that we had met before——"

"Good land of love—and the calves get loose!" he almost shouted as he held up his one sound arm to her. "My dear, my dear——"

"Oh, sweetheart," she whispered laying her hot cheek against his, "it's taken you so long to say it, but I love you all the more for the dear thoughts that made you hesitate."

He was silent a few moments, digesting his amazement, speechless with the great happiness that was his—and then Dolores was kissing the back of the hand of that helpless, bandaged arm lying across his breast. He had a tightening in his throat, for he had not expected love; and that sweet, benignant, humble little kiss spelled adoration and eternal surrender; when she looked at him again the mists of joy were in his eyes.

"Dear old Caliph John!" she crooned. "He's never had a woman to understand his funny ways

and appreciate them and take care of him, has he?" She patted his cheek. "And bless his simple old heart, he would rather give up his love than be false to his friend. Yes, indeed. Johnny Webster respects 'No Shooting' signs when he sees them, but he tells fibs and pretends to be very stupid when he really isn't. So you wouldn't be false to Billy—eh, dear? I'm glad to know that, because the man who cannot be false to his friend can never be false to his wife." Not necessarily true at all.

He crushed her down to him and held her there for a long time. "My dear," he said presently, "isn't there something you have to say to me?"

"I love you, John," she whispered, and sealed the sweet confession with a true lover's kiss.

"All's well with the world," John Stuart Webster announced when he could use his lips once more for conversation. "And," he added, "owing to the fact that I started a trifle late in life, I believe I could stand a little more of the same."

The door opened and Ricardo looked in on them.

"Killjoy!" Webster growled. "Old Killjoy the Thirteenth, King of Sobrante. Is this a surprise to you?"

"Not a bit of it, Jack. I knew it was due."

"Am I welcome in the Ruey family?"

Ricardo came over and kissed his sister. "Don't be a lobster, Jack," he protested. "I dislike foolish questions." And he pressed his friend's hand with a fervour that testified to his pleasure.

"I'm sorry to crowd in at a time like this, Jack,"

he continued, with a hug for Dolores, "but Mr. What-you-may-call-him, the American consul, has called to pay his respects. As a fellow-citizen of yours, he is vitally interested in your welfare. Would you care to receive him for a few minutes?"

"One minute will do," Webster declared with emphasis. "Show the human slug up, Rick."

Mr. Lemuel Tolliver tripped breezily in with outstretched hand. "My dear Mr. Webster," he began, but Webster cut him short with a peremptory gesture.

"Listen, friend Tolliver," he said. "The only reason I received you was to tell you I'm going to remain in this country awhile and help develop it. I may even conclude to grow up with it. I shall not, of course, renounce my American citizenship; and of course, as an American citizen, I am naturally interested in the man my country sends to Sobrante to represent it. I might as well be frank and tell you that you won't do. I called on you once to do your duty, and you weren't there; I told you then I might have something to say about your job later on, and now I'm due to say it. Mr. Tolliver, I'm the power behind the throne in this little Jim-crow country, and to quote your own elegant phraseology, you, as American consul, are *nux vomica* to the Sobrantean government. Moreover, as soon as the Sobrantean ambassador reaches Washington, he's going to tell the President that you are, and then the President will be courteous enough to remove you. In the meantime, fare thee well, Mr. Consul."

"But, Mr. Webster——"

"*Vaya !*"

Mr. Tolliver, appreciating the utter futility of argument, bowed and departed.

"Verily, life grows sweeter with each passing day," Webster murmured whimsically. "Rick, old man, I think you had better escort the Consul to the front door. Your presence is *nux vomica* to me also. See that you back me up and dispose of that fellow Tolliver, or you can't come to our wedding—can he, sweetheart?"

When Ricardo had taken his departure, laughing, John Stuart Webster looked up quite seriously at his wife-to-be. "Can you explain to me, Dolores," he asked, "how it happened that your relatives and your father's old friends here in Sobrante, whom you met shortly after your arrival, never informed you that Ricardo was living?"

"They didn't know any more about him than I did, and he left here as a mere boy. He was scarcely acquainted with his relatives, all of whom bowed quite submissively to the Sarros yoke. Indeed, my father's half-brother, Antonio Ruey, actually accepted a portfolio under the Sarros régime and held it up to his death. Ricardo has a wholesome contempt for his relatives, and as for his father's old friends, none of them knew anything about his plans. Apparently his identity was known only to the Sarros intelligence bureau, and it did not permit the information to leak out."

"Funny mix-up," he commented. "And by the

way, where did you get all the inside dope about Neddy Jerome?"

She laughed and related to him the details of Neddy's perfidy.

"And you actually agreed to deliver me, hog-tied and helpless, to that old schemer, Dolores?"

"Why not, dear. I loved you; I always meant to marry you, if you'd let me; and ten thousand dollars would have lasted me for pin money a long time."

"Well, you and Neddy have both lost out. Better send the old pelican a cable and wake him out of his day-dream."

"I sent the cable yesterday, John dear."

"Extraordinary woman!"

"I've just received an answer. Neddy has spent nearly fifty dollars telling me by cable what a fine man you are and how thankful I ought to be to the good Lord for permitting you to marry me."

"Dolores, you are perfectly amazing. I only proposed to you a minute ago."

"I know you did, slow-poke, but that is not your fault. You would have proposed to me yesterday, only I thought best not to disturb you until you were a little stronger. This evening, however, I made up my mind to settle the matter, and so I——"

"But suppose I hadn't proposed to you, after all?"

"Then, John, I should have proposed to you, I fear."

"But you were running an awful risk, sending that telegram to Neddy Jerome."

She took one large red ear in each little hand and shook his head lovingly. "Silly," she whispered, "don't be a goose. I knew you loved me; I would have know it, even if Neddy Jerome hadn't told me so. So I played a safe game all the way through, and oh, dear Caliph John, I'm so happy I could cry."

"God bless my mildewed soul," John Stuart Webster murmured helplessly. The entire matter was quite beyond his comprehension!

I can well believe it.

THE END

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